THE MYSTERY OF THE LETTER
(A Myrna Levesque Adventure)

James C. Burke

THE MYSTERY OF THE LETTER
(A Myrna Levesque Adventure)

Copyright © 2026 by James C. Burke

All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

[Read aloud duration: approximately six hours]

For information contact:

James C. Burke
jamescburke@live.com

MYSTERY OF THE LETTER

Hello, ladies; it's me again, Myrna Eloise Levesque, that very tall, bespectacled, eccentric, brown-eyed brunette who is sometimes pretty except getting messy is easier. I have a talent for figuring out maddeningly complex problems, too. Do you remember what we called our secluded college in the western mountains? No? That's fine. My beautiful bad-influence sister Ella and I graduated last week, Class of 1919 – hurrah! See, that didn't hurt; well, not much. I still cannot speak French fluently. What mattered more over the last four years was our summer apprenticeships in the sundry vocations of railroading. Remember, our family owns the company. Having received the required measure of academics, now we are returning home to start regular jobs in administration or do something useful. Mr. Oscar Buchanan, chief attorney of the company and Liz's daddy, sent us a letter. In case you don't remember, Liz is that raven-haired beauty with sparkling blue eyes and everything else in perfect proportion. Ella can't stand her, but I get along with Liz fine despite a few mean tricks she played on me way-back-when. Ironically, those predicaments always provided me with ample possibilities for socializing with handsome young fellows. Never let "inconveniences" get in the way of an opportunity – ha-ha-ha! Alrighty, back to that letter.

As Ella expected, Mr. Buchanan indefinitely assigned her to "Major" Richard Durant's station police supervising the lady officers. Since setting up their headquarters, this is the position she wanted. The company hired the first three in the fall of 1916, and now there are eight. The ladies are more efficient than the old men and the public likes them. I qualified as an officer, too, but Major Durant had exciting plans for me: that's right, ladies; working alongside him with the railroad detectives! After thwarting saboteurs' attempts to wreck Number 435, I'm ready for anything. Unfortunately, Granddaddy James decided that my practical education in the family business was becoming more dangerous than practical. Uh-huh, I'm pushed off on the Office of Chief Inspector Hennessy in the "administrative palace" where Mr. Buchanan can keep an eye on me.

A perplexing assignment

This morning Chief Inspector Hennessy threw me for a loop! Upon my arrival, I found Major Durant seated in the anteroom in the desk usually occupied by Liz. He said that she was off performing some clandestine service on the line, an unusual task for a corporate matriarch since we are not supposed to perform our duties away from Unity Terminal. The reason became clear during our conversation: she was secretly escorting an endangered records clerk from the freight office to another depot on the line. Very unusual! After reissuing my credentials, the Major ushered me into the office.

"Welcome back, Miss Levesque. Did you happen to read the Saturday morning edition of the *Messenger*? 'The Battle of Sandyfield Cutoff' is of particular interest to us. The article describes how several deputies led by your friend Chester Wilkes engaged a contingent of armed men attempting to ambush the jail wagon on its way to the courthouse. The previous evening, an anonymous informant described the plot in detail to Deputy Phales. Prior to the skirmish, we altered our plans which dovetailed with those of the sheriff. Major Durant had a part in it, so, at the opportune time. This is the tail end of a collaboration over several months though for the sake of maintaining secrecy we were not privy to certain particulars and contrarywise." What? "Without going into detail, the sheriff completed his half of the arrangement. Mr. Buchanan wants us to

prepare a detailed report on how he proceeded and whether his methods were productive. Sheriff Smallwood agreed to give you access to the pertinent files and permission to document the progress of his investigation. Our joint agreement still stands. For the time being, this is an inquiry. We have certain concerns about unwanted ears afoot so, be discrete." Ears afoot? Alrighty, here we go.

Mr. Hennessy was deliberately reticent for a reason: both he and the sheriff entered upon their collaborative undertaking suspecting somebody within their respective spheres was a turncoat. The warning from the informant proved both men correct while at the same time added to the problem an unanticipated party who successfully overcame the secrecy of the conspirators. The latter having set in motion their scheme with spoiled intelligence, thus the warning transmitted through the informant was irrelevant. Yet, it revealed the existence of others who had an interest in the outcome of the collaboration. At that moment, I was thoroughly confused but Mr. Hennessy assured me that Major Durant would clarify something in a roundabout fashion and provide his assistance.

Without further delay, Major Durant and I rushed down the front steps of the administrative building and then briskly walked to his automobile. On the drive to the sheriff's office in the courthouse, the Major told me to ask all the questions. Mr. Hennessy kept him in the dark about his dealings with the sheriff until Thursday evening. Even then, only to ensure that nobody tried to prevent Deputy Phales from putting Emma Waddell on the overnight express. Emma? I know her!

"Sir, is she a witness?"

"Definitely, Mr. Hennessy told me this morning that eleven men died trying to get to her, five of them at Sandyfield Cutoff after she and Liz made off. Until the sheriff apprehends those behind the plots, Miss Waddell isn't coming back. Nobody but Mr. Hennessy and Liz know where she is for now, not the sheriff, not me, not even Mr. Buchanan."

"Why Liz?"

"She's incorruptible and follows orders to the letter."

"Good enough. How did Emma end up in so much trouble?"

"In September, Emma delivered a letter from a friend of a friend to Arthur Mallet, the manager of the cotton works – now a sandy lot – and that was that, except she told her friend Myrtle Pruit about how Mr. Mallet said the letter saved his life. He mysteriously disappeared in January. In March, Mallet's fiancée Annie Cowan showed up at the *Messenger* office with a letter from him describing how a 'woman from the railroad' had information that an unnamed party was conspiring to do him harm. Myrtle told all the ladies in the freight office that Emma was the woman who saved him. There was intense public interest in the Mallet case, so word spread. Sheriff Smallwood had the *Messenger* print a statement in the next article concerning the case that Emma was not the 'woman from the railroad.' Too little, too late; it didn't work. A drifter tried to abduct her at gunpoint outside the freight office. Deputy Wilkes shot him dead. This morning, Chief Inspector Hennessy felt it was the appropriate time to reveal more of the sheriff's secrets. In April, somebody sent five men to spirit her away on their old boat. She jumped off. When the crew tried to run her down, the boiler exploded. Deputy Wilkes rescued her from the river before the newspaper men showed up."

"Goodness!"

"The sheriff hid Emma for about a month while Mr. Hennessy made his plans. In the meanwhile, Liz interviewed the ladies in the freight office to plant the notion that somebody took

the girl. In the railroad district it must be their mythical fiend, Demon Pete. That brings us to her secret departure."

"So, the boss wants to know how the sheriff turned a simple plan to protect Miss Waddell into a war."

"More or less. Before we meet with Sheriff Smallwood keep in mind the railroad's interest in this case is narrow: the first attempt to abduct Miss Waddell took place on company property; the explosion of the steam tug damaged one of our warehouses and a vessel tied off at the company wharves. Unless there is evidence connecting the disappearance of Mr. Mallet to the attempts to abduct Miss Waddell we are not concerned about letters or letters about letters or unsubstantiated rumors of conspiracies. The Arthur Mallet disappearance is something separate. After all these months, the sheriff has yet to uncover one clue supporting any assertion that the man was a victim of a crime or even himself. Don't worry about it. Chief Inspector Hennessy gave you this assignment because you have assisted Sheriff Smallwood and his staff under the provisions of the joint agreement. It is an inquiry which serves administrative necessity but not needed immediately. Besides that, reviewing documents and interviewing the sheriff and his personnel is safe, and Mr. Buchanan wants you to finish your detective training. Nobody expects more from you."

The Major parked behind the courthouse and entered through the rear door. An impressive flight of steps ascends the walls to the jail three stories above. The offices of the Sheriff's Department are located in the basement. Ella told me that the lobby of the main entrance was magnificent, its marble grand staircase the center piece. I wanted to see it! Not this time. There was work to do. After we exchanged cordialities, Sheriff Smallwood escorted us into an office for a discussion. This was not going to be easy. Major Durant told him that I was asking the questions. He was merely along to assist me. Fortunately, I had a method: work backwards. It also helped that Sheriff Smallwood was a frequent visitor to our house. Granddaddy James happens to be the biggest donor to his campaign fund – ha-ha-ha! We began by reviewing the events of Thursday, May 15.

The paperwork shell game

At half-past six that morning, Mr. Hennessy telephoned the sheriff to inform him that Liz was free to accompany Emma to her new life. Sheriff Smallwood explained what happen next.

"Miss Waddell voluntarily signed herself into protective custody on April 18. The women's division of the county prison farm has a section for those awaiting trial, and separate from their compound, a brick building reserved for special prisoners. It has its own walled-in courtyard. Usually, we hold those sentenced to a term in the penitentiary there until the state arranges transportation. In this division, it remains empty most of the time. To my knowledge, there was not a safer place to keep Miss Waddell; and might I mention she ate well, dressed in comfortable clothing, and had diversions to occupy her time. Only the head matron and the administration of the division had the required paperwork, and we did not register her in the courthouse jail. That is a flaw in our procedure which my corrupt predecessor used against his enemies. It worked well for making our young friend disappear. As an added precaution, I assigned Matron Margaret Cole to be with her at all times. Nevertheless, I suspected for some time we had a turncoat at the prison farm so getting the ladies safely to the train was risky. Since the division's administration receives the paperwork submitted to the office of the head matron the next day, I had another delay to utilize. Also, with a form signed by me, matrons and deputies can assume custody of a prisoner anytime providing that the head matron or head jailor receives a receipt accounting for the transfer."

Sheriff Smallwood thwarted the turncoats with these forms. Major Durant and I examined each. At nine o'clock on the morning of Thursday, May 15, he dispatched transportation orders for Miss Waddell and Matron Cole in the jail wagon pouch. There are four motorized jail wagons, two at the courthouse and two at the prison farm. The form had the ladies riding on the Friday afternoon run to the courthouse. The head matron sent her paperwork in a pouch to administration at five o'clock Thursday evening; and later, Deputy Phales presented the sheriff's orders to transfer custody of Miss Waddell to him and a form instructing the day matron to dispatch the noon jail wagon empty. This was the plan from the beginning regardless of what day Mr. Hennessy arranged a train. Earlier that evening, Sheriff Smallwood learned that the turncoat took the bait.

A go-between acting on behalf of political boss Cato Houghton telephoned a warning that "the pirates" planned a raid on the jail wagon to prevent the sheriff from putting Miss Waddell on a train. Pirates? So, when did Deputy Phales receive news of the impending ambush from Cato's informant? At nine o'clock on the evening of May 15! Deputy Phales telephoned Sheriff Smallwood at his Port Unity home on the Southside. The sheriff immediately called Mr. Hennessy. Major Durant, who had been silent up to this point, offered to fill the gaps insomuch as he could. Initially, Mr. Hennessy planned to have Miss Buchanan take Emma on the northbound evening express the next day. He had the Transportation Department prepare the paperwork that morning. But by midday, changed the unscheduled stop from the Eighth Street crossing in the upper yards to Haynes Town Station on the insistence of Sheriff Smallwood. Upon receiving the warning, the sheriff wanted to postpone. Mr. Hennessy insisted upon advancing her departure. He then telephoned Mr. Deschamps, the Master of Transportation, who in turn, telephoned the night manager of the Passenger Train Department to revise the paperwork for the unscheduled stop at Haynes Town Station. That evening, Major Durant's task was to secure the transfer of Emma to the northbound overnight express. After telephoning Liz, Mr. Hennessy drove to the Buchanan residence on Chestnut Street ten blocks away to give her a ride to Unity Station. Meanwhile, Sheriff Smallwood told Deputy Phales to prepare the form to transfer custody of Miss Waddell to Elizabeth Buchanan. Since the form required both parties' signatures and the legal documents from his safe, the sheriff drove immediately to the courthouse. Miss Waddell had to sign the document when she no longer needed protective custody. Knowing doctrinaire Liz, it occurred when they arrived at their destination. The sheriff also took with him an envelope containing cash for Emma. She was leaving behind everything.

Deputy Phales set out for the prison farm around ten o'clock, a half-hour trip by automobile. After presenting his credentials, he asked the gate guard to telephone the night head matron. It was eleven o'clock before he could leave with the ladies for Haynes Town. Major Durant was there to open the station for them because it closed at six o'clock. After that time, the express trains stop only with special orders. The prison farm is only a few miles away. That was the ruse. Deputy Phales and Head Matron Cole escorted her out to the platform to wait for the overnight express. The Major stood lookout at a distance with a rifle, ready to defend the party from the platform while they were inside the baggage car. When the train stopped curious passengers started gawking from their windows. Once the party was inside the car, Liz signed the necessary documents, and then Deputy Phales and Head Matron Cole return to the platform and waited until the train was out of sight. That's all we know about Emma until Liz returns. Major Durant secured Haynes Town Station and then reported back to Mr. Hennessy who was waiting at Mr. Buchanan's house. Phales and Cole returned to the courthouse. Success! Sheriff Smallwood recommended that I interview deputies Phales and Wilkes as well as Matron Cole for a more detailed overview of the particulars.

"Following the first attempt to abduct Miss Waddell, we labored to keep her identity concealed therefore the official reports deliberately obscure some details. When our investigation exposes the plotters, we intend to amend the record. Nevertheless, Mr. Buchanan should know since the railroad has an interest in the outcome. That is, in a discreet fashion." The sheriff is well-practiced in trickery. Having me interview all the principals informally ensures that my inquiry remains unofficial. "In a plot involving outside participants somebody familiar with the victim must serve as guide for the rest. Emma was not well-known, nor did she frequent the establishments in the railroad district. Aside from fellow employees in the freight office, she was friends with Florence Phelps, a recluse who rarely leaves Northeast Township. Matron Cole, and deputies Phales and Wilkes were the only members of my staff who knew her true identity. She told us about two irksome private detectives in the hire of a lady who assigned them the task of watching out for her, with questionable effectiveness, I might add. That aside, the plotters could have easily hired local hoodlums to maintain surveillance of Lavinia's house to achieve their ends. They don't need to know Emma, merely recognize her." Emma stayed with the widow Lavinia Hall, big sister of Sheriff Smallwood. "Whether through exposing the turncoats, ferreting out the local collaborators, or coaxing these private detectives out into the open, any one of these choices set us on the right path wherever that may lead." Indeed, he means three unmarked paths.

I managed to inaugurate my new notebook in a respectable fashion and had yet to hear an account of the "Battle of Sandyfield Cutoff." Sheriff Smallwood said Deputy Phales could take me to the front Tuesday afternoon in addition to explaining why the tattler referred to the ambush squad as "pirates." To finish off the day, Major Durant and I were paying a visit to the Transportation Division at Unity Station offices to examine the paperwork.

Presently, Sheriff Smallwood's investigation is at a standstill: Miss Waddell does not have a guess as to who is behind these abduction attempts but she suspects they want to know the contents of the letter she delivered to Mr. Mallet; nobody came forward to identify the eleven dead men (the sheriff is convinced they are outsiders); Mr. Houghton's informant received his information second-hand from two dubious "private detectives" who work for an unnamed woman; and none of Mr. Mallet's correspondences with Miss Cowan contain enough details to be useful. If "we are not concerned about letters or letters about letters or unsubstantiated rumors of conspiracies" then discovering how the turncoats became aware of the arrangements to spirit Miss Waddell away is our path forward. It took ten and a half hours to reach the ears of Mr. Houghton's informant, but the head matron at the county farm had not submitted the sheriff's false transportation orders until five o'clock Thursday afternoon. The informant had yet to intercept intelligence concerning it when speaking with Deputy Phales. However, the ill-fated "pirates" received it in time to rush out into an ambush at Sandyfield Cutoff. They thought Emma was still in the county meaning Mr. Hennessy's changes never reached them. Since the jail wagons run between the county farm and court twice every weekday, how could any turncoat determine that the sheriff planned to move Emma? Furthermore, trains occasionally transport prisoners. How could the turncoat know that one was taking her? Well, if we have our own turncoat collaborating with the one at the county farm it's easy. All the unscheduled stops for prisoners occurred with the westbound evening express (the state prison is on that line); the overnight express is northbound. Both trains follow the same northerly route as far as Wayne City but there the westbound splits off onto the Central trunk. Needless to say, somebody working at the county farm would know that, yet something still doesn't fit. The sheriff dispatched orders for the transport of Miss Waddell and Matron Cole at nine o'clock Thursday morning. He made no mention of putting Emma on a train. It is possible

that the turncoats never knew. The conspirators might think she is still in the county – ha-ha-ha! No wonder Mr. Hennessy was so cautious with the details of his plan.

****

Our "smart boys" Frank and Louis came by for dinner. Both served in a railway engineer regiment during the war. They regaled Granddaddy James with stories of their exploits. My friend Sergeant Phillip Quince of the lower yards patrol paid us a visit later. He, too, joined up with officers Billy Hubbard and Albert McComber. Billy is staying on with the military and Albert took a job as a policeman in Wayne City. Captain Johnston is stepping down from the station police after these many years to perform clerical duties in the Freight Department warehouses. Phillip is in line to take his place. After Mrs. Keane left, all of us went to the kitchen to cook fried chicken. Granddaddy James and the boys made the iced tea and helped us clean up. Wanting to leave no evidence, we took our feast to the backyard. Frank collected the bones in a bucket, eventually burying them behind a hydrangea bush.

Unexpectedly, Locomotive Designer Elbert Skinner and Chief Engineer Edmund McNair dropped in for a visit. They were too late for fried chicken, but Ella and Louis were churning ice cream, another breach of Mrs. Keane's dietary rules. Granddaddy James remarked that those who dictate what you eat and when you eat it are intent upon controlling how you think. Uh-huh, you think about what you could be eating – ha-ha-ha! At some point in the conversation when we returned inside for coffee and ice cream, Mr. McNair described his study of the damage caused by the concussion when the steam tug's boiler exploded near the company wharves. It shattered windows in our warehouses and scattered debris throughout the lower yards and on the opposite bank of the river. Some vessels at the company wharves were damaged. His calculations of the forces exceed that of a small boiler bursting. It was an antiquated river tug with a hull made of oak without ironclad sheathing, but the blast should have taken off the deck and wheelhouse, leaving the hull still a float. Instead, the force tore it apart. He suspected explosives destroyed the tug. Mr. Skinner, somebody familiar with boiler explosions, agreed, adding that an old low-pressure boiler was too small to produce that much force when it burst. From what he heard, Hall boatyard built it in the 1850s to tow wooden hulled barges and assist other vessels upriver. He also was convinced that the tug was carrying explosives. Granddaddy James thought somebody deliberately blew up the tug but like other mysterious violent occurrences over the years, villains made it appear accidental. The official investigation by the harbor authorities was inconclusive. Wanting to know more, I asked the gentlemen to explain the circumstances surrounding the event. It was then that I learned about the "pirates." A group of armed men from upriver stole the old tug from the layup basin of the salvage company, navigated the Northeast River down to Port Unity, and then proceeded to go on a rampage on the North Docks, taking an unidentified woman hostage. She escaped. Once they returned to the tug to make their getaway, the boiler exploded. The harbormaster called the men "modern-day pirates" when the reporter from the *Messenger* interviewed him. I anticipate Deputy Phales has a better story.

The battlefield

Tuesday afternoon, Deputy Tom Phales led us to the site of the ambush on County Highway. It is located immediately northeast of the Sandyfield Cutoff, the dirt road heading south to the crossroads at Sandyfield, about seven miles from Unity Terminal. A quarter mile through the woods by an old wagon road is Haugh Landing; and from there, a horse path follows the riverbank for about a mile. The whole of the Northside of County Highway is woodlands for three miles. This is where the five men chose to await the jail wagon. On the morning of May 16, Chester

Wilkes sent six deputies up to the prison farm in automobiles at six o'clock. At ten o'clock, he had another three take their position on the horse path in preparation to come up on the men from the rear, and then deployed a group of four deputies on Sandyfield Cutoff. The ambushers crossed the river in a rowboat and came up from Haugh Landing. From there, they advanced through the woods. At a quarter-past one, the leader of the gang came out of the trees and fired a shot in the air as the jail wagon approached. The driver and deputy atop took cover. The detachment of deputies on the horse path fired a volley. Gradually advancing under cover, they blocked the gang's escape through the woods, and then eventually drove them out into the road. Deputies from the jail wagon fired on them; and when the survivors retreated towards the cutoff, Wilkes and his colleagues wiped them out. Deputy Phales sarcastically remarked that Chester Wilkes was doing a splendid job of foiling the summer offensive.

"The newspaper article makes this whole mess seem like a surprise attack on the jail wagon with the aim of breaking out the prisoners. It was a trap! From the beginning, Sheriff Bert wanted to put deputies inside that empty jail wagon in case of trouble; but after Cato's man called, he wanted Chester to capture the ambushers. The editor of the *Messenger* calls them pirates because it excites the public imagination. About the only similarity between these fellows and the crew in the tug is they came up from the river. They put up a steady fight. No surrender! The last man went down shooting! Our men were cautious at first, advancing slowly from the rear. They fired in sporadic volleys whereas the ambushers expended their rounds in a continuous willy-nilly fashion – lots of bullets but none hitting their mark. These out-of-town fellows brought in to do the dirty work are inexperienced dupes, no doubt lured in by the prospect of making quick money. I think they're pushed off wasters from the sticks. Emma and Florence Phelps were onto something about bootleggers bringing moonshine from stills upriver to one of the landings north of the railroad bridge. We suspect that they are Laine County boys. Monday, Sheriff Smallwood is sending me upriver to meet with Sheriff Jackson and the manager of that salvage company that had the tug. I think you should come along. I'm leaving on the morning mail train."

"Mr. Hennessy might consider it."

"I plan on taking the coroner's photographs of Chester's recent batch of dead men to see whether Sheriff Jackson recognizes them." Major Durant nodded.

"Yes, we're going."

"Good. That brings me to another matter: this business about passing letters to Arthur Mallet might fit one way but Emma did other chancy work on the side. To start, Emma was a topnotch spy who clued us in on the location of every secret mart of vice in the county. That girl soaked up every detail! We could use her no more than eight times a year, but she brought in a full load every time! Her acting was flawless, changing from Lavinia Hall's prim demure darling to that cracked-brain wild-girl from the sticks who everybody liked. Luckily, nobody saw through it, I hope. A bigger problem for her was Florence Phelps." That Florence Phelps had a hand in the mayhem is disconcerting.

"Florence? That lady can't stay out of trouble."

"She *is* trouble. Emma might be a bit daring and unpredictable, but Florence is maniacal and occasionally dangerous. Both grew up as farmgirls, but Florence attended that fancy women's college with Jane Deschamps."

"Yes; we call it 'the cold storage locker for young ladies.' Our Miss Buchanan was in their graduating class, too."

"I had the pleasure of meeting her on the platform at Haynes Town Station. As you might recall, Florence gets into binds by snooping on her own. She can't let go of the murder of her

daddy. Never mind that she ends up in jail or nearly killed! Chester tried to help her with these investigations, but that lady has no qualms about taking big risks. Imagine 'Shoot-em-up' Wilkes shying away from danger. Say, I remember when you pulled that station officer out of the line of fire when that crazy fellow went on a rampage."

"That was protective instincts. I did it without thinking. Bravery requires some apprehension. That's Chester."

"No doubt about that. He needs it! Trouble knows where to find him whereas Emma goes looking for it. They were an odd team. Did Sheriff Smallwood tell you that the woman taken hostage by the 'pirates' was Emma; and before that, a man held her at gunpoint?"

"Not specifically, but it wasn't necessary. I am still working on the events following those incidents, particularly the period that Miss Waddell was in protective custody. I would like to interview Matron Cole, examine a jail wagon, and visit Emma's quarters at the county farm."

"That's easy. We still have your paperwork for assisting the department with investigations. You can ride along when Margaret makes her run after court and take the tour of the women's division. She'll be delighted to hear the full story about Wayne City Junction. That's one for the history books by my reckoning!" Uh-huh, that's why Mr. Buchanan is keeping me on a short leash. "I can take you home when you're done." Major Durant nodded.

"That sounds fine to me. How about Thursday?"

"I'll expect you in the afternoon, say, between three and four. There is one last entanglement you need to hear. Emma was associated with two mysterious 'brothers' claiming to be private detectives who drove about the railroad district at night in their fancy Peerless automobile. Very strange! I wouldn't put it past Emma to join up with them."

"Goodness!"

"Sheriff Bert thinks those fellows are out to start a war. Emma told me that they ride around the county sabotaging the moonshine trade. They blew up stills! Even invited her to come along to watch! She said they snatched Griggs' bookkeeper Emmet Hamer and threatened to bury him alive if he didn't let them know about who was on the secret payroll, you know, bribes. They work for 'a lady!' That sounds like crazy talk, but Emma doesn't make things up."

"Sir, is there anybody other than Miss Waddell who can corroborate these accusations?"

"Hamer could but don't expect it." Do you like surprises? Deputy Phales has an unending supply of them. Sandyfield Cutoff is not the best place to have a conversation, particularly since it was recently a battlefield, but I was willing to endure the heat, dust, mosquitoes, and unsettling artifacts to hear more. "Emma had a fellow named Ned Moseley." I met him once! "He was a foreman in the freight car yards or something like that. In early February after an ice storm, he had an accident. That tore Emma up! She was never quite herself afterwards. Going back to September, the week when the flu started, Emma was with Ned in that stand of trees opposite Potters Field having some fun right-on past dark. Ned dosed off on her just when things were getting good. That didn't sit well with Emma, so she decided to go home, leaving him sleeping off his drunk in the woods. On getting to the dirt road which runs on the east side of County Cemeteries from Mulberry to the marshaling yard, she saw the Peerless parked alongside the entrance to Potters Field. Knowing Emma, she had to take a peek at what was going on. Alongside a freshly dug grave ready for the first flu burial, she saw two men and a well-built lady wearing a veiled hat holding a railroad lantern. Between 'her boys' was Emmet Hamer, tied hand and foot, his mouth gagged. Those two threw him face-first into the grave and one started shoveling in dirt. Emma ran off but turned back to get Ned. The light from an arriving passenger train cast light through the trees revealing her. The boys chased her down, she tried to fight, but one rapped an arm around her from behind and

lifted her feet off the ground. The other went back to the automobile to get cord to tie her up. Emma isn't tiny. She's limber, fast, and can put up a fight. These 'bruisers' as she would say were your height and had the physicality of wrestlers. Before they could get her tied, Ned rushed up from nowhere and started landing punches on them in a frenzy. To make a long story short, they got away, and ended up hiding behind the Presbyterian church on Chestnut until making their way back to North First. Emma kept it from Sheriff Bert until much later."

"Why?"

"Folks in the railroad district started seeing the men in the Peerless not long after Dick Browning shot himself. Sheriff Bert sent deputies out there to watch for them off and on, but nothing. It looked like Demon Pete had company – more superstition. Emma first heard about them from the ladies in the freight office when she started work. After 1916, the reports stop coming. That's when residents of the railroad district brought back Demon Pete. If anybody disappeared, Pete took them. Ned decided to go to Mr. Hamer's warehouse to ask to see the boss. He was alive and well, ready to sell anything. That turned out to be a bicycle. Ned left his in the woods and wasn't about to return to get it. About a month after his accident, say, the middle of March, Emma got on the wrong side of Cato Houghton. The next day, she was walking on Mulberry, and the Peerless started pacing her. When she started to run, Adam stepped out from the corner of a building, grabbed hold, and tossed her into the rear like a sack. Even when she was on good terms with 'her boys' Adam and John, if she hesitated about going along or gave them lip, they manhandled her into their automobile. Anyway, the first time, they took her on a ride out of town. Along the way, Adam explained that 'The Lady' wanted them to apologize for scaring her silly and now their assignment was guaranteeing her safety – 'her guardian angels.' When you have a chance to chat with Emma, she will recite word-for-word their entire conversation. That's her gift but I imagine carrying around all that junk in her brain might account for not being quite right. Here is what she told me about those two: these 'private detectives' go by Adam and John Smith, claiming to be brothers. It's hard not to laugh. They are vigilantes if you ask me. Emma said they took a few years off to join the war before the rest of us decided it might be the right thing. They're crusaders! Right. Chester's official report on Emma and the 'pirates' mentioned two strangers with a boat who helped him rescue her from the river. First off, they didn't rescue that girl from the river, they pulled her into their boat. She is a good swimmer. Adam and John were the strangers! Furthermore, they helped Chester search for Emma after she slipped out to look for Mrs. Hall's crazy daughter-in-law. Some of your officers found Lucy in Unity Station waiting for her dead husband's train. As for that poor dupe who tried to abduct Emma without help, she pulled her 'lady pistol' on him before Chester came rushing in for the kill."

"Sir, we had better stop for the day." I was getting a headache. Mrs. Keane would throw a fit if I didn't arrive home in time to dress for dinner. It's hot so I must soak in the bath and wash my hair before putting on a nice dress. Frank and Louis are joining us.

****

After Mrs. Keane left for the evening, Ella brought out her "contraband" pound cake to have with our coffee. While enjoying this forbidden treat, Granddaddy James gave us a comprehensive review of old news. Of particular interest to me was the mysterious disappearance of Arthur Mallet, the manager of Cowan Cotton & Fabric Company's warehouses, gins, and compress located near Unity Station. In early September, he announced that the company was closing its Port Unity facility at the end of the year. After stopping production briefly during the flu, the cotton works was running at capacity around the clock. In late October, somebody smashed the windows in Mr. Mallet's Commerce Street home and then his clerks took over the offices, bringing business to a

standstill. Some workers joined them. They were protesting not only the loss of their jobs but the complete dismantling of the plant. Many had worked there before Cowan acquired it in 1909. Not only that, but it was also the last remaining mill south of Unity Terminal. The working-class neighborhood it supported would thereafter fall to progress as the business district of Port Unity was pushing outward toward the station. Alfred Cowan sent in his man Thomas Lawson with private detectives to remove the agitators. Sheriff Smallwood stepped in with his deputies to prevent a riot. Within days, the leaders of the unrest relented, and then production resumed. After the mill closed in late November, Mr. Mallet stayed on to oversee the dismantling of the machinery. He left Port Unity on December 23. In early January, Alfred Cowan telephoned Mr. Hennessy claiming that Mr. Mallet returned to Port Unity by our railroad on January 2, and sent a telegram stating he was leaving on the afternoon express on January 6, but never arrived. Mr. Hennessy conducted a thorough investigation, finding no clue that he travelled to Port Unity, not even a baggage receipt. Mr. Cowan then contacted Sheriff Smallwood. He too was unable to uncover proof that Mr. Mallet came to Port Unity. None of his acquaintances saw him, his name didn't appear on the register of any of the hotels, and nobody expected him. If the man disappeared, it happened somewhere else. Arthur Mallet was handsome, charming, and well-liked in Port Unity society. He was once engaged to marry Florence Phelps, but she broke it off. He later became engaged to Annie Cowan, the daughter of his boss. Several articles came out in the *Messenger* about the man after his disappearance, but Granddaddy James did not follow the story.

Like Mr. Hennessy and Sheriff Smallwood, I was inclined to agree with their assessment: lacking any supporting evidence, it appeared that somebody waylaid Mallet elsewhere. That is, if he didn't skip off. Ella remarked that the case reminded her of the disappearance of Pete Bresnahan in 1890, a mystery proving to be more difficult to solve as of late. In 1914, Coroner Cordell said the bones of the murdered man found in an unmarked grave on the old Haynes Plantation fit the available physical description of Bresnahan, but he could not prove it if the need ever arises.

****

We heard about the men in the Peerless from railroad workers. They first appeared in 1912 when Dick Browning was sheriff, not after his untimely demise. Granddaddy James said both Sam Culver and his stepsister Jane Deschamps hire private detectives. The Popular Coalition has their neighborhood "committees of public safety" in the Northside, and the sheriff employs spies like Emma. The various "outside businessmen" have their tattlers, too. Since the completion of Unity Station and other improvements to the terminal, several parties prize real estate in the railroad district so they need "ears afoot" – ha-ha-ha! Anticipating that the north end of the Port Unity business district will expand to the terminal, Sam Culver and Jane Deschamps are acquiring whole blocks. Cato is buying up parcels strategically, expecting to sell them at a profit to Sam. The county commissioners continuously block annexation efforts by the city to preserve a major source of their tax revenue. If there are spies and turncoats in the company, it is a predictable hazard of doing business on contested ground. Still, Deputy Phales remarks about two specific "private detectives" are disturbing. Stirring up a war might be their plan: they blew up stills, threatened Joe Grigg's bookkeeper, intercepted communications from everybody's turncoat, hmm, right, they wanted names from Griggs' secret payroll, and they used Emma as bait for luring adversaries into traps. They were in an excellent position to break the tenuous *entente* between the political and the criminal. Despite Sheriff Smallwood's statements to the contrary, Miss Waddell could have made a host of enemies: the political bosses' crooked crews of obsequious lackeys, the "outside businessmen" who challenge Mr. Houghton's feudal order in the Northside, and the Laine County bootleggers. I don't think the sheriff considered the possibility that different parties or several in

collaboration perpetrated the three attempts to abduct her. Likewise, the "private detectives" might be employed by a coalition of disparate stalwarts, say the Port Unity muckety-mucks, *The Family*, and the "committees of public safety."

Much to my dismay, Ella mentioned in passing that Boss Joe Griggs the fallen old kingmaker of the Popular Coalition was dead. Like his friend Fred Wheeler, fishermen found his body washed up on the Laine County bank of the Northeast River. This was in early-May. Since nobody has seen him much since the Election of 1912, many were surprised that he had not died earlier. Orrin Blackwell remains the chairman of the coalition and Mr. Houghton, as always, is the chief financial backer though the movement has been in decline since the beginning of the decade.

****

During the summer of 1914, Chester turned his attention to the unsolved missing person cases spanning a decade. We had one man go missing from a track crew in 1904, four years later, two from the same crew disappeared. From 1904 through 1913, six residents of the Northside, all businessmen, never came home. In 1912, the three witnesses in the Fred Wheeler bribery case vanished after an assassin shot Judge Phelps. A few months later, four "special constables" arrested Florence Phelps on Mulberry Avenue in the presence of many witnesses. It was an abduction. The men held Florence in a dark structure like a cellar, deprived of food and water, drugged, and then left unconscious on the drive leading to her farm. Between 1912 and 1915, the "special constables" abducted four men from the railroad district. The "committee of public safety" stopped the "arrest" of a fifth man. Statements from the relatives describe the same: well-dressed lawmen with official-looking badges and credentials, carrying side arms and handcuffs, presenting arrest warrants, and driving a Hudson *Model 33 Torpedo* touring car. Chester is convinced that the "special constables" are responsible for all these disappearances. After their confrontation with the "committee of public safety," the faux lawmen never returned to the Northside. Fortunate for them! Everybody was wise to their game.

The vanishing act

Friday, Mr. Hennessy allowed me to spend the rest of the day continuing my inquiry. At the moment, nothing else was pressing. This time, instead of waiting for the Major to give me a ride, I boldly told the boss that I was taking the trolley to the courthouse. He approved providing that a station officer came along, so I asked Sergeant Quince. Deputy Phales met us at the rear of the courthouse. There were two open jail wagons parked nearby. Excellent! I wanted to look inside one! He was more than happy to honor my request. Much to my surprise, they are nothing more than modified motorize furniture vans clad with a thin layer of sheet metal textured to look like armor and painted locomotive black. The interior smells like seasoned wood. Long benches extend to the front on both sides. The large, barred openings above seated head height, left, right, and front allow for light and ventilation: I imagined something more constrictive.

"Climb inside and take a seat." Since this was my long-overdue chance to be inside one of these notorious vehicles, I did. In front of each bench were six evenly spaced rings bolted to the floor. "Since it is necessary to handcuff the prisoners in front to prevent them from falling face-first, we use leg irons." Now, that sounds more like a proper jail wagon! "They keep the passengers from attacking the staff assigned to manage them." Deputy Phales asked whether I wanted to stick around until court lets out at five. If so, he could include me in the next trip out to the county farm.

"Do you have the paperwork for me to sign?"

"Yes. Riding out and back in the guise of a matron or prisoner?"

"How did you send Miss Waddell out?"

"I think you know. Still want to go?"

"Uh-huh! You know my style." Aside from acquiring some authentic appreciation of the dreaded ride without having committed a crime, it might give me a clue as to what Sheriff Smallwood isn't telling me, and unofficial details Deputy Phales would rather have me find out for myself than ask him. I removed my uniform jacket and hat, and then handed them off to Sergeant Quince along with my satchel. "All done: no company papers, equipment, money, notebook, hidden handcuff keys, lockpicks, accoutrements, ginger snaps, and playing cards – ha-ha-ha!"

'What about that dandy pick in your hair?" Oops!

"Right you are, sir." After removing it, I placed it in Mr. Quince's hand. "Don't lose that, Phillip. I'll need it when the 'special constables' kidnap me. There; all done!"

"Best let the sergeant report back to your boss. This might keep you occupied until about nine o'clock, so I'll drive you home."

Emma signed herself into voluntary custody after her narrow escape from the tug. She knew exactly what it meant: incarceration at the prison farm for a month or longer. To ensure her safety during the trip, the staff treated her as anybody in custody. I intended to do the same for a few hours. While Deputy Phales filled out my paperwork, Matron Cole prepared me for the ride. Off the vestibule of the women's wing is a large room for storing the women prisoners' clothing, supplies, and the matron's equipment. After telling me that I was receiving "light treatment" like Emma, Matron Cole told me to remove my jewelry, tie, and hair ribbon. Before placing these articles in a wooden box, she entered them in a ledger. The next step involved surrendering my blouse, skirt, and shoes for cursory search of my undergarments and person, including any pins hidden in my tangles. I passed my examination!

"This is a nice blouse! What say we put it aside folded neatly along with the skirt and shoes in the box? I'll fit you out with one of the quality dresses our gals wear in court." I agreed. It wouldn't feel authentic without the appropriate attire. "Six-foot even? Right?"

"Minus a half-inch, call it six." Momentarily, she returned from the back with a fresh "quality go-to-court dress," canvas slippers, and a gleaming pair of wrist traps. Once dressed, I needed some minor adjustments to look my part.

"There; shake out that hair. That's it. Can you see without those glasses?"

"Up to a distance, say, about twenty feet."

"They can go in the box, too." That's it! Once again, I blithefully raised my vulnerability up several notches for a role. "You do not look like the same gal! Here, I picked out some pretty bracelets especially for you." Uh-huh, shiny new ones. "You'll like the smooth rounded edges. Nice! Ready to try them on for size?"

"Certainly!" She laughed, and then proceeded to cuff me.

"There! What do you think?"

"Perfect fit, comfortable as it gets; lightweight tempered steel, and the locking mechanism is first rate; yes, my hands are definitely secured, and I especially like the nickel finish."

"Think you can escape this pair?"

"Hmm, let me think. That depends on, well, not in this situation. I'd say no, absolutely not. I'm ready to go!"

"In that case, I'll unlock them at half-past eight this evening." It looks like a certain overly high-spirited lady found herself thoroughly caught again. "Sign the ledger and then at the bottom of this sheet. After I hand it off to Tom, he'll do the rest." I did. She pinned a card to my dress. "This is your number for the ride. Don't lose it. It matches your paperwork."

"Is that about how long it took with Emma?"

"More or less. Sheriff Bert brought her over at half-past seven, soaked to the bone. Immediately, Tom started preparing her paperwork. There wasn't the time to waste on the unnecessary. Sorry, no hosing down, no jailhouse soap, no getting a good going over. The jail wagons left at five o'clock with the prisoners from court and were due back at half past eight. Emma stripped down, toweled dry, and then put the jail dress on. After I fastened on her bracelets, we waited in here while the sheriff arranged an extra trip back for us, leaving at a quarter of nine. It's listed as personnel transportation on the log. We did not enter Emma into the records here to avoid what eventually happen at Sandyfield Cutoff. I have a few things to do before we go so chat a while with Tom. We're glad to have you back. Ready to try on some of these darling ankle bracelets?" Her euphemisms tickle me.

"Yes, ma'am." That was it! Matron Cole placed me in the custody of Deputy Phales.

****

"That was quick! You signed early, too. How did that happen?" I laughed and showed him my gleaming new 'bracelets.'

"I'm a lady who has a propensity for getting herself into binds with handcuffs. No matter: they are a remarkably effective means of curbing my rambunctious nature."

"Slightly. Sign here and it's official." I did.

"There; I'm in custody."

"Right; just like the rest of our customers; but after the last time, you ought to be used to the required procedures. When you perform clandestine work as a prisoner, you sign yourself into our safekeeping. That means you are an actual prisoner. It's not just another opportunity to hone your acting skills. Every rule and procedure applying to prisoners applies to you. The same was true for Emma. Having second thoughts about going?"

"No, sir; taking the ride to the county farm and wearing my 'quality go-to-court dress' satisfies my suppressed appetite for novel experiences. Besides, it looks like I'm staying locked in these until half past eight anyway – ha-ha-ha!"

"No doubt about it. Margaret put you in the top-notch pair we ordered after your crafty acrobatic burglar slipped out under our noses. They're made with the resourceful sort in mind, particularly those clever enough to make their own lockpicks."

"Special precautions for me?"

"Definitely; after you demonstrated how she broke out, I added a note to your file: 'professional escape artist, use custom order superior cuffs with unique key.' You're the first to need them. How's that?"

"I'm flattered! Tell me more about the paperwork sleight-of-hand with Emma."

"Margaret presented the protective custody papers for Emma Waddell to the head matron at the county farm. Emma's name appears in her log as a special prisoner so the administration there had the proper paperwork. It is on file permanently. The sheriff has the document ending her protective custody in his safe. Mr. Hennessy should have those Miss Buchanan had Emma sign. Nobody has all the pieces."

"Sheriff Smallwood thought of everything."

"Since she was separate from other prisoners and Matron Cole stayed with her the whole time, only a turncoat handling her file could inform the conspirators. We have narrowed our list."

"I can imagine my unexpected arrival and sudden departure might prompt a turncoat to communicate the anomality. When should I expect a visit from the pirates?"

"That'll be the day! Major Durant told me that few are better trained than the Levesque sisters in confounding kidnappers, and he is confident that any idiot foolish enough to try will regret it. Aside from that, both of you are constantly changing your looks."

"What do you think of this transformation?"

"Better than the schoolmarm disguise. Definitely more interesting."

"Excellent; I'm a dangerous woman. No, I'm not – ha-ha-ha!"

"You had me fooled. What's next on your list?"

"Reviewing the official reports on the other abduction attempts and then interviewing Deputy Wilkes. These 'private detectives' are an intriguing addition to the cast. Consider this: if the kidnapers, pirates, wasters, what-have-you think Emma is still here in protective custody, we set a trap for them, hopefully bringing them in alive."

"Providing Chester has something else to do that day, it might work."

Grasping my arm firmly, Deputy Phales escorted me downstairs to the rear of the courthouse to witness the loading of the jail wagons. Picture three chattering women prisoners standing at the rear of a *faux* ironclad furniture van, all waiting their turn to mount its steps, helped by one of the deputies inside and a young matron standing below. All came from court: the jury was out on the case against one; another received a two-week sentence; the judge sentenced the third to five years at the state penitentiary. Frazzled and testy, this bunch was impatient to be underway. Deputy Phales told me to tell any who might ask that the deputies just arrested me, so Matron Cole decided to send me on since there was room. After seating me inside the jail wagon, she positioned my legs and then padlocked the irons to the ring.

"In case you get thirsty, I have a pail of water and tin cup. Just ask and I'll dip some up. Otherwise, sit back and enjoy the ride." Goodness! Matron Cole gently jerked a knot in me. It's like the doctor with his two-inch needle saying, 'It's just a little mosquito bite.' The grave implications of the situation were settling in: I'm now trapped in the paperwork stream!

My keeper had me at a disadvantage completely. Without a doubt, even my sister could not break out of the jail wagon. After Matron Cole handed off her keys to the deputy in exchange for her club, he shut us in and padlocked the door from the outside. When the driver started the engine, we received a noxious whiff of motor exhaust. It dissipated after we started moving. I anticipated a torturous baking after the deputy locked us in, but the many barred openings above vented the heat. Already, my ride in the jail wagon was surpassing my expectations. Having no window to view the landscape made the whole ride disorienting. I sat still, eyes closed, just listening. On the brick paved streets of the city, it was a slow smooth ride. Passing over the Fourth Street Bridge established our location: the sounds of the terminal. The motor was loud, but the women continued conversing over it. One said that it was the seventh time she took the ride. The brick pavement ended abruptly a block beyond the terminal. We were on the so-called County Highway. A long bumpy ride followed. I knew the railroad paralleled the highway on our right, and then crossed it at an angle before Sandyfield Cutoff. By my estimate, the drive had taken us only four miles. For a one-hour trip that was one-fourth the distance or fifteen minutes! Though it didn't feel like it, we were travelling at the proper pace. The bridge over Buzzard Creek at eleven miles was the next noticeable change in the ride. Haynes Town was two miles further; and the turnoff to the county farm, three miles beyond. The jail wagon gently rocked left and right constantly on the gravel highway, and the vibrations were intense. Bumps and holes acting upon the leaf springs felt like riding bareback. The exhausted girl sitting next to me wanted to talk. She had blond hair and blue eyes like Ella, a friendly face, and wanted to spend her two weeks working in the vegetable garden. Her crime was public drunkenness. So, what did I do? Trespassing. "It's a good thing there was

room for you. The courthouse jail is terrible!" Right, I could look forward to hot meals, flushing toilets, and walking in the courtyard at the county farm. At that moment, we cross the tracks below the station. Four miles remained until we turned onto the drive leading to the prison farm. I heard the whistle of the southbound afternoon express. The schedule has it leaving Northeast Depot at a quarter of six. That meant we passed Haynes Town.

The turn into the drive of the prison farm was jarring. Our next sharp turn was taking the road leading to the Women's Division. Matron Cole explained that there are two walled-in sections within the main wall: one contained the barracks, workshops, and gardens for those women serving a sentence. They made and repaired the jail dresses and men's uniforms, did the laundry, made the stinky soap, and tended the garden. The other walled in section was for prisoners awaiting trial. It had cells inside a large brick building, a dining hall and kitchen, an office, barracks for matrons, and open-air stalls for bathing. In a separate enclosure, there was a small one-story brick building for the special prisoners. The jail wagon stopped to unload us after it passed through the main gate. The office of the head matron was located there. It was a relief to feel the rush of fresh air when the deputy opened the doors.

"Holding up, Miss Cole?"

"Fine. Do I look as bad as these gals?" He hesitated.

"No. Ready to unload them?"

The deputy removed an envelope from his satchel, opened it, and then called out our prisoner numbers one at a time. Once formally accounted for, Matron Cole unlocked our legs irons from the ring and the deputies from the jail wagon helped us down the steps. The head matron signed a receipt for each, including me, but she also signed the paperwork transferring me back into the custody of Matron Cole. While two of the ladies were escorted to their respective places freed from their required inconveniences, the woman going to prison, and I needed our "bracelets" for justifiable reasons: the woman was going to remain secured and under guard when not in a cell until the state police came for her; I was going back so unlocking my restraints was an "unnecessary risk." Rules are rules. Another matron took the other "dangerous woman" to the main hall to receive jail dresses for her stay while Matron Cole gave me a tour of the small brick building. It had an impressive, armored door; a guard patrolled outside when in use. Inside, there was a spacious area for the matrons guarding the prisoners and two rows of cells, eight in total. At the moment, all were unoccupied. Indeed, the cells had flushing toilets in addition to hot and cold running water. At the end of the aisle between the cells, there was a shower stall. The rear door opened into an enclosed courtyard. The cots in the cells had fresh linens.

"This is it, Miss Levesque. Emma wore regular clothes here not a jail dress. I never locked her cell; but for safety, locking the doors after dark was necessary. She didn't need bracelets until we left for the train. Both of us slept on these cots, exercised in the courtyard, and read anything the head matron sent over. A guard brought our meals. Emma was constantly chattering but none of it made much sense to me: 'her boys' Adam and John showing up late; little boats picking up moonshine from the dock; thugs working for Joe Griggs killed her fellow Ned; she only met Arthur Mallet once; and her long stories about growing up in Northeast Township. That's all."

"Is this where Sheriff Browning kept Florence Phelps?"

"Yes, he kept her in a cell for a month without ever registering her in the courthouse jail. The rascal wanted her lost! Nobody knew what happened to that girl until the overseer at her farm paid Mr. Smallwood a visit. Even then, Judge Hastings wouldn't let her out on bail. He freed her until the trial after the state attorney entered the picture. Dick Browning decided to withdraw the charges to avoid a stink. The whole mess provoked Mr. Smallwood to run for sheriff and clean out

Browning's cronies. A twist to this story is Sheriff Bert reshaped Dick Browning's dirty dealings with Florence into a way of saving Emma. Time to go. My shift ends at nine."

At seven-thirty, the deputies check my papers and then loaded me into the jail wagon. I was the only passenger, but Matron Cole deviated slightly from procedure. After seating me, she didn't padlock my leg irons to the ring. "You're leaving like Emma so expect a short trip." After Matron Cole signed my receipt, she handed over her keys and we were locked in. My trip back ended abruptly on the drive leading from the main gate to County Highway. When the doors opened, there was Deputy Phales, leaning against his idling automobile. Matron Cole rolled her eyes. "What a pleasant surprise. Take her, and don't dilly-dally after half-past eight." With some help, I placed my jostled posterior gingerly into the passenger seat. After signing the transfer of custody papers, Deputy Phales assumed his place behind the wheel.

"Let's go for a ride." He put the motor in gear, and then we took off into the waning daylight full throttle. Oops!

So, they took Emma to the station in cuffs and leg irons, not to say it didn't come as a surprise to me. So what? It's their usual procedure: that is how the deputies take anybody the station police arrest to the courthouse jail – Emma was no different, I am no different – it makes perfect sense. As a trained officer, I can appreciate the necessity of keeping those in custody compliant and safe from themselves. What about the jail wagon? Despite being a humiliating and uncomfortable ride, it is a safe way of transporting prisoners, safe for them and safe for those who guard them. I cannot imagine any practical means of keeping Emma safer at the moment she needed to be in safekeeping. Good enough! Now, let's continue with what I really expected to learn from this quest.

My short-lived visit to the prison farm illustrated the sheriff's method of cloaking Emma within internal administrative inefficiencies. The transfer of custody from Matron Cole to Deputy Phales occurred on a different branch of the paperwork stream, namely, that of the courthouse jail. While the pouch carried by the deputy riding atop the jail wagon contained my receipt, he delivered it to the jail. The head matron at the prison farm received confirmation of the transfer the next morning. If Deputy Phales and I went missing, there was no need to trace the stream back beyond Matron Cole. We were due back at the courthouse jail at half-past eight. She noted that on the receipt. The record of my time in voluntary custody includes transportation orders, receipts, and log entries, all eventually compiled in my file at the courthouse jail. Like Emma, the prison farm also has a file on me, but it only contains my personal particulars and paperwork pertaining to my brief incarceration, fortunately listed as a training exercise. In short, this is how Sheriff Smallwood intended to snare his turncoat and momentarily obscure reality. He is adept at using bureaucratic procedure and legal documentation as traps, which vanish. I didn't fully appreciate the devious nature of the sheriff's method until my few hours in custody. Signing myself out anytime was certain, but it might take a while to navigate the paperwork stream. In the meanwhile, I was a prisoner until half-past eight. The movement of the administrative gears is all but invisible on the official record. Even so, the trail ends with Emma signing herself out of the custody of the county with the sheriff's legal documents and Deputy Phales' receipt. The latter records the time but not the place. Those details appear in Liz's documents.

On the way back to the courthouse, Deputy Phales raced down bumpy County Highway at breakneck speed to beat the clock. This tour was definitely an adventure!

"I'm sure you didn't take a ride in the jail wagon just to satisfy your 'appetite for novel experiences.' You wanted us to replicate our game."

"Certainly, but after a year in the cold storage locker, I am ready for any novel experiences coming down the pike. You can slow down now."

We arrived at the rear of the courthouse minutes before the jail wagon pulled in. Deputy Phales unlocked my legs so we could quickly ascend three stories of steps to the jail. Just in time! At half-past eight exactly, I signed myself out of custody. Matron Cole unlocked my cuffs, and then took me back to the women's wing to retrieve my personal possessions and identity. In short order, she repaired my appearance. Well, not quite: the afternoon-long trip left me disheveled and messy beyond remedy, but she at least restored my devious schoolmarm look. Upon my return to Deputy Phales, he presented me with a form to sign for my pay. That's right, ladies; the department was paying me a modest amount for training in accordance with the joint agreement. On the ride home, I pondered the mechanics of setting up a trap that could expose the turncoats both in the sheriff's department and the company without bringing about another battle. I hoped that Mr. Hennessy was receptive.

****

I think Sheriff Smallwood's game worked exceptionally well but there appears to be an unknown party from without who aided his efforts. If Adam and John are real, their role was sabotaging the conspirators. How would they go about it? To start, the "secret payroll" they pried from Emmet Hamer gave them a roll of all Boss Griggs' turncoats.

My ruse

Mr. Hennessy did not object to my unusual outing and considered the intelligence I derived from it valuable. He judged my investigative methods sound and the first time ever said that he considered me "a mature woman who was capable of making the appropriate decisions to achieve a satisfactory goal." In other words, providing that my unorthodox techniques are not scandalous or place me in mortal peril, go ahead. That I assumed the guise of a prisoner and took a ride in the jail wagon to solve a case only enhances the reputation of the valiant crimefighting Levesque Sisters, a mythology he created to account for our very public, real-life, death-defying, and utterly mindless heroics. That said, it would make for a better newspaper story if my sleuthing directly contributed to the apprehension of those behind the slipshod plots to abduct Miss Waddell. Goodness!

Concerning my idea about setting a trap for the turncoats, the boss demurred. The possibility of inviting an armed assault upon a train or station is unacceptable. Uh-huh, I figured out a way around it.

"Sir, originally, you planned to have the evening express stop at the Eighth Street crossing for the hand off. Why the change?"

"Yes. The guards close both gates of Eighth Street a half-hour beforehand and afterwards to clear the way for the three arriving afternoon expresses, the evening mail trains, and three departing evening expresses. There is so much traffic passing over multiple tracks at the same time that anybody attempting to stop the transfer had too many obstacles to overcome: in addition to the gate guard, two watchmen, the upper yards patrol, and moving trains, the array of tracks between the passenger yard and Eighth Street offers no place to hide. I changed it to Haynes Town Station after Sheriff Smallwood told me that he was hiding Miss Waddell nearby and considered bringing her to Port Unity too risky. It was only later did I learn that nearby meant the prison farm."

"Obviously, Sheriff Smallwood has a turncoat in there who communicates with the plotters. That somebody told another party who told Mr. Houghton's informant about the planned assault on the jail wagon is clear, but he said nothing about which train was taking Emma, nor anything

about an unscheduled stop for the sheriff to see her safely onboard. Since the plotters might still believe Emma is in the county, I propose a special train like the one Mr. Creswell ordered up for financier Simon Parks using Number 435 and a baggage car. The best place where the sheriff can meet the train is at the Unity Bluff station where the great outer arc cuts through the bluff to the bridge. Through express trains transferring passengers stop there at night after Unity Station closes; other than that, freight train spot cars on the turnouts near the station. Accessible only by the dirt road extending from the lower yards, the location has all the qualities of your stop in the upper yards at Eighth Street plus more. The sheriff can position his deputies on both sides of the cut, through the bluff, and behind the freight cars."

"That's too good; ideal for another massacre and they'll sense it. On the other hand, after failing at Sandyfield Cutoff, the ambushers, if they had the slightest hint of strategic intelligence, would mount their assault on the dirt road. The point of weakness is the quarter mile between the wharves of Houghton Metalworks and Unity Bluff Station. It has a dense stand of trees on the east side and west of the roadway, the descent to the river is steep: the best place to box in the sheriff's car."

"That's right, but the sheriff's men can encircle them nicely, too. Here is the part that's sweet: the *faux* special train is not at the station. It's all on paper in the Transportation Department and Mr. Skinner goes through the motions of firing up Number 435, but it only goes to the first turnout above the upper yards beyond watchful eyes, or it might be a good opportunity to take it out on a run. I hear that he's made some improvements."

"Brilliant, Myrna, I'll discuss your plan with Sheriff Smallwood."

"Can I have a part in it?"

"No; continue your inquiry." Drats!

The little boat

We discussed several curious aspects of the attempts: Deputy Wilkes came to the rescue late during the first two, and he thwarted the third quite effectively; the mysterious Adam and John appeared out of nowhere with a boat during the second attempt; and Deputy Phales received the call from Cato's informant just in time to alter the plan to send Miss Waddell away with Liz despite the fact that Mr. Phales was the only person who knew that Sheriff Smallwood made changes.

"Sir, Sheriff Smallwood's plan was not dependent upon which day Liz was able to take Emma, nor did the telephone call from Cato's informant influence how he carried it through. The tattler merely confirmed when the assault would take place and where."

"I suspected as much: using the turncoat to trap the ambushers. Fine; it worked too well. Tell me more." My thoughts drifted back to Adam and John.

"The North Docks accommodate large vessels, not tiny boats. The 'detectives' could not appropriate one nearby. It is an easy task finding out whether somebody's fast little boat is missing, used without the owner's permission, or rented by two 'bruisers' driving a fancy touring car." Mr. Hennessy recommended that I check into the latter. It might provide us with the only proof that Adam and John are real. Deputy Phales' secondhand account from Emma is not enough. At this point, I brought up my idea about speaking with Cato Houghton. No matter: Ella sent him tickets for tonight's performance of *The School for Scandal*. Oh, I want to see it! Mr. Hennessy was taking me, too; but I had to fix my hair properly atop my head so it wouldn't unwind and wear my finery along with my mother's jewels. Wonderful! Could I wear my glasses? Yes, but only during the play. Could I speak with Mr. Houghton? No, Ella is discreet. He wanted me to serve as a distraction for Sam Culver, gossips, and muckety-mucks.

My sister Ella established a very productive and risky collaboration with the present populist faction kingmaker Cato Houghton during the summer of 1917. While helpful to Sheriff Smallwood, he wanted to remain her secret source of intelligence on all the unsavory enterprises in the railroad district. Cato is a political rival of the sheriff; in business, he and real estate developer Sam Culver are longstanding adversaries. Mr. Culver also supports the reform faction which is in opposition to the populists. Granddaddy James backs the reformers. Uh-huh, she is walking a tightrope.

Ella and Cato

I enjoyed playing some gracious version of myself though it took me an hour to properly set my coils so they would stay up for the evening. Standing alongside Mr. Hennessy during the intermissions, the grande dames, muckety-mucks, and their hangers-on had to meet me. "My, you're so statuesque and beautiful in person! The photographs in the *Messenger* don't do you credit. Don't get me wrong. You look darling in that smart uniform, so stylish and modern! It's wonderful how you saved that young officer from the bullets and shielding that naughty lady with your body. The Levesque girls certainly did their duty on the home front! Do you have beaus?" Yes, plenty and some to spare. I am the Sweetheart of the Engineering Department. "What attracted you to police work?" The handsome young officers! After they took me into custody, how could I resist? I didn't say any of that but it's true, except my type of work is drafting, making calculations, and repairing machines (like locomotives). "What do you plan to do now that all the men are coming back?" I simply smiled. All of them are not coming back. Mr. Culver stepped in just in time to save me from uttering something offensive in French. "Good evening, Miss Levesque. We've missed you at the theatre this last year. Professor Hennessy said you finished college this spring. Congratulations!" Professor? Well, it's true but Chief Inspector is more impressive. "I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting of business at my hunting lodge." Culver's Lodge is a fabulous mansion decorated in a rustic style. The last person who did any hunting on the estate was his daddy, and he did more drinking that shooting. Jane Deschamps, Mr. Culver's beautiful but reclusive stepsister is the only woman who participates in the "meeting of business" while the gentlemen's wives and children enjoy the grounds and sundry entertainments. So, he is inviting me? Well, he invited Ella, too. Liz ought to come. Together, along with Granddaddy James, we represent five-eighths of the shares of the railroad – serving eighty percent of the local economy. Now, just how much are the shares worth these days? I have no idea. The value of the company's physical assets is stupendous! We have to wait until the stockholders meeting in November to see the annual financial report. So, never mind. Where was Ella?

My sister disappeared at the beginning of the first intermission and did not descend the steps from the mezzanine until the final curtain. She spent most of the play sitting with that handsome old devil Cato Houghton. He is very charming, and much admired on the Northside. During the corrupt reign of Sheriff Dick Browning, Cato's minions organized "committees of public safety" to combat crime in their neighborhoods. Browning's deputies took bribes and looked the other way; the committee meted out justice when the authorities failed to uphold the law without payment. While Cato never condones extralegal action, he maintains an army of informants within the entire county. He might be a genuine populist but first, a businessman.

"So, tell us what he said."

"Mr. Houghton received his information from Clarence Yates indirectly through an informant and is a latecomer to the intrigues; however, he is certain two competing parties are involved, one being the Laine County bootleggers." Who is Clarence Yates? "Cato was confused about the

information he was receiving but had his informant pass on the details about the plot to abduct Miss Waddell to Sheriff Smallwood. The so-called 'pirates' are the same batch of outside hirelings who donned the disguise of 'special constables' to abduct Florence Phelps and several residents of the railroad district." I think we must show the coroner's photographs of those unidentified men to Florence. "Everybody wants Emma Waddell because Michael Shaw claimed that Arthur Mallet left behind something valuable that ended up in the hands of 'The Lady' for safekeeping." Who is Michael Shaw? "The letter Emma delivered to Arthur is not what he led Miss Cowan to believe." What? "The last time anybody saw Mr. Shaw, he entered the rear entrance of Whitaker & Blackwell Wholesale Hardware. His automobile stayed parked behind the building for three days, and then disappeared." So, if we find his automobile abandoned in the woods- What make of automobile? "A Dodge Brothers *Model 30*." I must get one! "Cato indulged in some speculation: he thought Shaw had Mallet killed; but after three failed attempts to abduct Emma with eleven men dead, somebody considered Shaw an unnecessary liability." He thought the something valuable doesn't exist or if it does, 'The Lady' has it. Goodness!

Upon arriving home, Ella confessed to slipping out of the theatre with Mr. Houghton for a stroll. Along the way, they sipped from his flask of quality brandy – last chance, sister – making it back just before the curtain. Fortunately, at the theatre in Port Unity, the five-minute intermissions are fifteen and they occur within acts to encourage socializing. Good enough. I sense Ella and Cato are mutually charmed, a perilous move.

Despite the deluge of Mr. Houghton's perplexing assertions, I intended to continue my inquiry in a systematic fashion. Accompanying Deputy Phales to his meeting with Sheriff Jackson seemed more promising – Uh-huh, I'm the tagalong girl!

Mr. Parnell

Monday, Major Durant, and I accompanied Deputy Phales to his meeting with Sheriff Jackson. We took the mail train to Spring Garden, the Laine County seat, and waited in the courthouse for the arrival of Mr. Jackson. He was bringing Clyde Parnell, the manager of the salvage basin, a branch of the Hall Shipyard Company. They also own the abandoned boatyard north of the railroad bridge on the Northeast River. To get to Parnell's business we would have to drive on an unimproved dirt road for an hour or ride on the daily freight train that traversed the spur leading from Spring Garden to Wayne City. It follows the bends of the river and wouldn't complete its only run until late afternoon, leaving us stranded midway until the next day.

Upon viewing the photographs of the five bullet-riddled men, the sheriff recognized all of them. As Deputy Phales guessed, they were local "wasters" from the wooded environs fronting the river, all unskilled laborers who occasionally worked in the lumber mills and on the landings. Otherwise, they hunted, fished, and cut firewood for the moonshiners. All of them spent time in the county jail at least once, usually for brawling, drunkenness, and trespassing. Mr. Parnell called them "backwoods boys" who were good for a week's pay and then they returned to their shacks. He was more concerned about two of his best men who disappeared in April. They were not among the scorched and shredded five who perished in the boiler explosion. Nevertheless, both knew how to navigate the bends and snags on the upper reaches of the Northeast River. Deputy Phales was curious about whether they were skilled in operating the steam tug.

When the Hall Boatyard closed in 1909, the recently refitted steam tug propped up with timbers in the yard behind the engine house remained. Previously, it saw service on the river towing barges and maneuvering the river steamboats into the drydock. Its hull was oak, and the engine was an antiquated wood burner. It was not up to the demands put upon the modern tugs at Port

Unity. In 1918, with the war ongoing, the managers at the Hall Shipyard wanted it readied for use ferrying a barge from the South Docks to the spur at Unity Bluff. That never materialized. Even so, Mr. Parnell's men Horace Clayton and P.J. Groves took a crew to the old boatyard to launch the tug using skids and the disused stationary engine that once powered the site's workshop. With a little work, they were able to fire up the tugs boiler and bring it back upriver on its own power. The boiler was fine! After the war, Parnell planned on removing the engine, rebuilt it for coal burning, and use it to power a crane. Deputy Phales asked whether the explosion of its boiler would have blasted its hull to splinters. He didn't think so. At most, it would have destroyed the deck, leaving the hull intact. Since Clayton and Groves could operate and navigate the tug, Deputy Phales thought finding them was a priority, even if their remains were resting on the silty bottom of the river.

Mr. Parnell noted that the tug would have to take on wood somewhere between Sics Landing and Haugh Landing, if not earlier. Its builders never intended to have it travel far. Either somebody must cut the wood and stack it at a landing, or another vessel came alongside with the load. All the modern steam-powered boats on the river have coal-burning boilers.

On our return to Port Unity, Deputy Phales said that he found Sheriff Jackson's identification of the men encouraging. However, he didn't understand why it took a month for Mr. Parnell to report Clayton and Groves missing. He reported the theft of the tug immediately and wasted no time coming to Port Unity after learning that a vessel matching its description exploded off the Northside Docks. These men seemed like the prime suspects; either that, or the other men forced them to run the tug. Miss Waddell said there were five men onboard, not seven; Mr. Parnell could not identify any of them by their remains. Major Durant broke his silence.

"You established the identities of the five men who participated in the ambush. Sheriff Jackson and Mr. Parnell recognized all of them but could not do so with the previous five. That suggests that the conspirators recruited them from elsewhere. Without Clayton and Groves, they were able to run the tug and navigate the river. That is something the 'backwoods boys' couldn't do." Deputy Phales shook his head.

"How in the world could they find Emma running about looking for Lucy, much less identify her on sight?"

Our first discoveries

Adam and John are real; their Peerless is real! They rented the boat from Mr. Jimmy Clark, the supervisor of the Hall Shipyard, offering him one hundred dollars cash for the day and left their automobile as collateral. Clark would have sold it to them for a fraction of the rental. They were huge men, very polite, and sounded like New Englanders, "certainly affluent gentlemen." The duo used the boat for a few hours and returned with it after sunset. He didn't have a receipt for the transaction since the boat was his private property, and they returned it in good condition. The gentleman who introduced himself as Adam did all the talking. Mr. Clark recalled that they rented the boat before the boiler on "Parnell's old tug" burst. "They didn't bring anything along, not even fishing poles, and neither looked properly dressed for an excursion." I asked him about Horace Clayton and P.J. Groves. He didn't know them. Thinking they worked in the Laine County salvage basin; he looked through the company employee records. Clayton and Groves repaired boilers at the Hall Boatyard from 1891 until it closed in 1909. What? He figured their present ages to be fifty-five and fifty-eight, respectively. Both were qualified to navigate steam powered vessels on the river, except those registered for passenger service, meaning in this case tugs and salvage craft. So, did Mr. Parnell lie to us? Mr. Clark thought not. He merely hired them for special jobs such as

retrieving the neglected tug from the abandoned boatyard. Proving it meant finding the receipts for the cash payments. Later in the day, he telephoned Mr. Hennessy after retrieving the account records pertaining to the tug. Parnell paid Claton and Groves to launch it in the water at the old boatyard, make the engine operational, and navigate it upriver to the salvage basin. He then paid them to completely restore it for use transporting a barge between the shipyard and the landing at Unity Bluff. The purpose was transporting salvaged metal to Houghton Metalworks & Scrap. The shipyard abandoned the plan when they decided it was cheaper to hire one of the tugs working the South Docks. That's all that Mr. Clark could find on Claton and Groves. He didn't have an address for either. So, that was an easy day of sleuthing. Why hadn't Sheriff Smallwood and his deputies spoken with Mr. Clark? Well, they dismissed the men in the Peerless as railroad district lore and Deputy Wilkes called them "strangers in a boat" in his statement, yet I think the sheriff is hiding something, or he doesn't want to give life to a useful myth. If Deputy Phales didn't believe Emma's story, I would think the same.

We decided to revisit the abduction attempts. On Thursday, March 27, 1919, an unknown drifter attempted to abduct Emma Waddell at gunpoint. Picture this: it was five o'clock in the afternoon; he waited outside the entrance to the freight office; other employees left work at the same time, and North First Avenue was busy, many witnesses, including those who would notice him waiting; she surprised him with her pistol, and Deputy Wilkes chased him to Rose Street; he ran down the alleyway behind the hotel and that's it. Chester Wilkes happened to be there because that was his assignment: see Emma to work and back. Why? Other than a bad-tempered encounter with Cato Houghton over the price he was offering Lavinia for her house, Sheriff Smallwood has yet to explain why she needed an escort for two blocks in broad daylight on a busy street. Nevertheless, the drifter needed to recognize Emma when she stepped out, so somebody was helping him.

Our narratives of the attack of the "pirates" on Tuesday, April 18 have inconsistencies. Once again, Deputy Wilkes escorted her home from work at five o'clock. Lucy ran out the back door, Emma followed, Deputy Wilkes was on the front porch. Adam and John were where? Station officers found Lucy on the concourse around six o'clock. An unknown crew docked the tug at the base of Rose near the railroad's wharves. Emma's "boys" met Wilkes halfway on Mulberry between North First and River Street. The tug blew up around seven o'clock. Uh-huh, something is wrong. Jimmy Clark said Adam Smith and his brother John rented his boat before five; and they left their Peerless. It is a mile from the company wharves to the beginning of the South Docks, and the Hall Shipyard is three-quarters of a mile further. Their boat must have been nearby, say, north of the company wharves. Also, I'm not sure about how long it takes to build up a head of steam for 1850s wood-burning boilers powering boat engines, but there's not enough time in this scenario without steam. The crew didn't abandon it cold. Nobody was tending it so pressure dropped, but it wouldn't take much time to build it up. From the Hall house to the station is a straight line for two blocks. Adam and John were going to the Hall house up Mulberry and Deputy Wilkes was heading toward them, perpendicular to the direction Lucy and Emma were running? Everything is wrong! Sheriff Smallwood's report is second hand, not figuring in the statement of Jimmy Clark, time, distance, direction, and thermodynamics, but it is dramatic.

Analyzing the ambush at Sandyfield Cutoff was unnecessary. In addition to visiting the site, Deputy Phales gave me a complete tour of the "battleground" along with his comprehensive account of the engagement.

Mr. Hennessy thought we needed to recalibrate the other narratives to physical reality. The first abduction attempt required reconnaissance, practice, and rapid implementation. The culprit

needed to come up quickly, place a gun in her back, preventing her from making a risky move. If done smoothly, she would have little choice but go with him. He hesitated, approached from the side, and didn't anticipate facing her pistol, nor that Deputy Wilkes was stalking him. We decided to carry our analysis outside to the nearby environs of these events. For the first attempt, Mr. Hennessy assumed the role of the abductor and I, Emma. He discovered the best position to wait for me was the shelter at the trolley stop outside the entrance of Unity Station. If done correctly, he could stroll on the sidewalk from the trolley stop to the doorway of the freight office, placing an imaginary gun in the small of my back as I turned to walk south toward the Hall house. Learning her routines meant the culprit knew Deputy Wilkes was meeting her so having an accomplice with an automobile at the ready was essential to the success of the plot. On foot, the deputy would confront the man, either prompting him to run or use Emma as a hostage. The attempt failed not because Emma had a pistol in her bag, but she saw the culprit in time to retrieve it meaning he approached her from the side not behind.

As told, the attack of the "pirates" is an ill-planned debacle, yet when we adjusted for time and distance, it was an elegant example of competing maneuovers. If the raiding party didn't come on the tug, they made the journey by automobile or train. The afternoon expresses and way trains arrive at three o'clock. Bringing professional criminals from distant parts seemed more plausible by means of the latter. Like the lone drifter or hired outsider, they needed local accomplices to assist them in the assault upon the Hall house. The best approach was through the back entrance. Deputy Wilkes brought Emma to the front. A six-foot-high brick wall surrounds the back yard with the rear gate opening onto Second Street. Considering this, Lucy could only get to the station by leaving through the gate and continuing two blocks on Second, passing behind the Magic Lantern and the Railroad Hotel to Rose. The cleared blocks where the cotton works once stood are on the opposite side. With the exception of vendors providing services to the hotel, few use the street. The men caught Emma leaving this way, saving them the trouble of assailing the house. Mr. Hennessy thought Adam and John planned to seize the tug but mounting a defense at the Hall house was better: the walled in backyard was a trap when the rear windows on the second floor serve as shooting positions and Lavinia's double-barrel would prove handy if somebody made it through the door. After paying a visit to Mrs. Hall's house, which also included obligatory tea and butter cookies, he concluded that Deputy Wilkes alone could mount an effective defense long enough to receive assistance from his colleagues a block away. Overall, the plot seemed ludicrous. It was entirely contingent upon surprise: a violent housebreaking in broad daylight during the busiest afternoon hours. On the other hand, it was audacious, and could have worked if the culprits achieved surprise. We'll never know. Lucy upset the timetable for all parties.

With Emma taken, cutting off the route of escape was their next strategy when the gasoline powered boat is reintroduced into the scenario. Yet, if Adam and John disposed of the tug's crew before setting out to thwart the assault, where are their bodies? The explosives are another problem. Though Adam and John could use explosives, it wasn't to their advantage. Somebody wanted to remove everything, the crew, the hired help, the tug, and Emma, or things didn't go as planned. Sheriff Smallwood's "official report" is short on details. We needed Deputy Wilkes account to fill the gaps.

****

In the afternoon, I strode unaccompanied through the bustle on North First, passing the familiar haunts of the Friday throngs: the Railroad Hotel Dining Hall, the Magic Lantern, Cram's Sandwich Shop, and the Walnut Café. At Mulberry, I turned the corner at the Hall Mansion. Crazy Lucy waved from the downstairs window. Immediately, the cleared block where the several

massive buildings of the Cowan Cotton & Fabric Company once stood captured my attention. The block adjoining it behind the Railroad Hotel once contained the warehouses. Everything was gone. From the belvedere of our house on Fifth, I studied this void in the neighborhood through the telescope. It is more startling and bleaker at ground level. One block further on Mulberry was the old store that the deputies used as their auxiliary station. This is where Chester Wilkes was meeting me. Upon entering, a puzzled prim lady in a white uniform asked whether I lost my way. “No, this is the right place. I’m here to see Deputy Wilkes.” She cleared her throat, and then pointed over her shoulder. His office was in the rear of the long, open room.

“Good afternoon, sir. Remember me?”

“Myrna Levesque! How could I forget? Sheriff Bert said Chief Inspector Hennessy was sending you over. What does he need to know?”

“May I ask you a few questions about the pirates?”

“Pirates? Bumblers is more like it. Since Emma is safe, I can tell you the whole of it. That is, providing the full story doesn’t become public, particularly the craziness – Florence Phelps, Sam Culver’s private detectives, Lucy. It wouldn’t help one bit! So, ask away.”

“Why did the sheriff have you see Emma to and from work back in March?”

“Two men in a fancy touring car started following her. Folks in the railroad district reported seeing it repeatedly for years, always at night. Sheriff Bert posted deputies in the neighborhood a few times. They saw nothing. You might think it was more neighborhood silliness like Demon Pete, but I knew it wasn’t something otherworldly because- Can I trust you not to make a stink about this?”

“Certainly!”

“I drove it a few times. The fellows who owned it were Sam Culver’s private detectives, Clarence Yates, and Ruppert Kline. They joined up in Europe before we entered the war, leaving their Peerless in Florence Phelps’ barn, and said she could use it.” Now, we’re getting somewhere! According to Chester, Yates and Kline had experience in performing covert assignments behind enemy lines and his “acquaintances” from the South Docks saw the Peerless frequently visiting the neighborhood. No doubt Yates and Kline knew about Mr. Clark’s boat in advance of renting it, implying that they also obtained details of their adversary’s plan. Wonderful! “For a while, I helped Florence search for the place where the kidnappers took her. She thinks they handed her over to the bootleggers but no telling. Sheriff Bert gave up on it because no houses near the river have cellars. The men had her sedated with something, I guess laudanum, so he suspected it was the cellar of a house in town. I think it was on the river, not a cellar, a small structure without windows like a storeroom. There’s one at the closed Independence Ice Factory and a cluster of empty brick buildings at the abandoned Hall Boatyard, both properties owned by Lavinia Hall and Jane Deschamps. I liked Florence, but we parted ways, that, or I would have no choice but arrest her. Without going into specifics, she’s dangerous. Getting back to Emma, Sheriff Bert refused to hear anything about the Peerless, but he thought after she had a run-in with Cato, his men were following her. He gave me the assignment since it was close to the deputy station where I work. So, morning and evening, I saw her to work and back.”

“Did you ever notice anybody watching you?”

“How could I tell? North First during business hours is constantly in motion and busting at the seams. Do you want to hear the rest?”

“I sure do!”

"That fellow who tried to take Emma must have had a partner. There was enough time to get her into an automobile before I was close enough to stop him. What saved Emma was the 'lady pistol' in her bag."

"She saw him first. That makes sense: if he came up on her from behind, she couldn't get to that pistol soon enough."

"Our girl put up a fuss, too: screaming, cussing, yelling for help. Everybody within earshot stopped. You know the rest, so I'll go to our next scrape. A month later, I brought her home after work. Before going inside, Emma told me to wait a moment on the porch before heading back to the station. She brought out a plate with two fried chicken legs, a piece of hot cornbread, a glass of iced tea, and a linen napkin."

"I must invite you over when Ella and I are cooking fried chicken."

"Anytime! I sat down in a porch chair and had a little feast. About the time I finished the tea, a giant man in a dapper suit called out to me from the sidewalk. 'Say, how do you like our Peerless? Doesn't she drive sweet?' I gave him a dirty look. 'What's the idea following our girl?' He said, 'Protecting her, just like right now. They're coming this way to break-in and take her.' Oh, hell! 'What are you talking about?' He grumbled 'The same hired hoods who took Florence, that's who!' Before I could say another word, Mrs. Hall came out upset about Lucy getting out the backdoor. Myrna when after her. I told her to get her double-barrel and bolt the doors. 'Any ideas, deputy? I was planning to help you defend the castle. Who's this Lucy? A pooch? Never mind; it's broad daylight, so I think they're coming by way of the street running behind the hotel. If they're not inside the gate now, we can stop them there. My brother is waiting for them at their boat.' When we turned the corner on Second, we saw five men strolling along with Emma approaching the turn onto Rose. 'That's them! They have her, so there's nothing to defend here.' We dashed across the Magic Lantern lot to North Front and cut down to River Street. His partner met us, a big fellow with a limp. He said the men took Emma onto the tug, so he couldn't do anything about it. The 'captain' and his 'stoker' took off running toward the South Docks about the time he arrived with the little motorized boat."

"So, Ruppert Kline, the man with the limb, dropped off Clarence Yates, the giant in the dapper suit, at the pier at the bottom of Mulberry, and then continued to Whitaker's dock, adjoining the company wharves."

"He brought the boat under the railroad wharves. The 'crew' tied off the tug at the old cotton works' pier."

"Then, they took off running."

"Yes, it was minutes after they tied off. The fools arrived soon thereafter, cast off, but they didn't have enough steam to get her going. I told the foreman of the lower yards to telephone the harbor patrol. They must stop that tug from going upriver. I am only speculating, but I imagine running a steam engine is more involved than stoking the fire and waiting for something to move."

"Yes! When you have a free afternoon, I would be delighted to show you."

"They were drifting on the current in the middle of the river, black smoke pouring out of the smokestack, and it's wheels weren't moving."

"A sidewheeler – ha-ha-ha! So, Mr. Parnell thought he could use an antique crosshead engine to power a crane? Tommyrot! That rascal was keeping the tug for something else, say, running moonshine. We'll never know."

"That girl wasn't saying anything! Fed up with her sharp tongue, they left her tied up. She started working some slack into her cords. Two of the brutes tossed a sack over the side attached to a rope. I couldn't figure out what they were doing. They had Emma inside, torturing her into

talking. That's a scary situation! The water pushes the sack in around you until it fills, but the air is gone. Now was the time for that girl to slip her cords and force her hand through the tied-off end of the sack. Its knot slipped off. She was out! Emma can swim like a champion! Those fellows started to turn and couldn't handle it. The paddle wheels move forward, back, forward, and froze. Adam and John, as Emma calls them, came sweeping behind the tug with their gasoline motor. It was a wide arc to get around to Emma. The bow of the tug pointed toward the ship tied of at the railroad wharves but the whole thing was drifting toward me. The fools were coming within range. I had my revolver ready to pick off the two on deck. That would even things: three to three. Well, the Peerless boys could take on all five without firing a shot. They're professional soldiers and big. The explosion was ear shattering; the wake from the blast about capsized that little boat; wood and metal came raining down but most of it on both banks of the river – that's blasting out! Some of it came my way. Emma dived under. Yates and Kline pulled her into their boat and brought her to me. I took her directly to Lavinia and called Sheriff Smallwood. He told me to stay put until he arrived and then go back for a chat with the Harbor Patrol. You know the rest."

"So, Chester, the time from which Adam, rather Mr. Yates, showed up at Lavinia's house until the explosion was about an hour."

"Let's see. I guess it was. Emma was off work at five, we walked two blocks to the house, I had my fried chicken and hot cornbread: twenty-of sounds more like it but after that, we jumped into action. Despite what Sheriff Bert wrote, he stretched out time, we didn't search long for Emma because there she was! Dash one block north, two blocks west, and then another block north: four blocks total. Missing a toe didn't prevent me from keeping up with the big fellow. The fools, I'm not calling them pirates, walked the same distance by Second to Rose to the North Docks but had a one-block head start. When we made it to the river, everything happened fast, too, alarmingly fast! I took Emma home. We were a mess! The folks who supplied the tug wanted everybody gone, including our Emma. I tell you; the 'captain' rigged that tug to blow! That's all there is."

"Assuming that is true, there are at least two parties with competing interest: one wanting Emma to reveal her secret; the other trying to prevent her from doing so."

"I'm inclined to think that Emma was bait from the start. Somebody local is giving the amateurs directions to the traps. You suggested Mr. Parnell kept the old tug to transport moonshine for the Laine County bootleggers. Now, he doesn't have it. Still, there must be something much worse at the root of all this."

****

Though Chester Wilkes and Tom Phales brought clarity to the narrative, piecing together accurate details of the abduction attempts was irksome after our collaboration brought to the fore the enigmatic Clarence Yates and Ruppert Kline. I found Mr. Yates' revelation that the "pirates" were the same men who abducted Florence and likely numerous others especially discouraging. If they were those killed in the tug explosion, it might be difficult if not impossible to expose who hired them. I still have yet to tease out clues from Florence's statement that would lead us to where the "special constables" held her. Nevertheless, in 1914, Chester eliminated some sites from the list by exploring the long-abandoned Haynes and Sics plantations, the surrounding woodlands, and the neglected landings. All these occupy a stretch of three miles downriver from Haynes Town. What hasn't received serious scrutiny is the two miles upriver between the railroad bridge and the abandoned Hall Boatyard. There are some credible reports including Chester's observations that Laine County bootleggers unload crates of moonshine at Sics Landing. Florence claimed that Lester Whitaker's Northeast River Navigation Company uses the boatyard wharf for that purpose, but Sheriff Smallwood discovered they were distributing baskets of produce to the residents of this sparsely inhabited area. I'm still hoping that the sheriff might persuade Lavinia Hall and Jane Deschamps to allow us to examine the site with all its buildings. Hitherto, the Hall Shipyard Company attorney has imposed unreasonable conditions for an unofficial visit. Ironically, hunters frequently make camp there and vessels

plying the river tie off at the wharf overnight without permission. That said, Mr. Buchanan was satisfied with my initial report but doubted whether I could progress further with my inquiry.

Lydia's drawing

I thought having a discreet conversation with Mr. Culver was past due.

"Sheriff Smallwood couldn't find Yates and Kline when residents of the railroad district saw them regularly. Since Sam Culver employed the two it follows that he should be able to contact them." Mr. Buchanan inhaled deeply and then cleared his throat.

"That's sticky, Myrna. Where do you start?"

"I start by walking down the hall to my grandfather's office and ask him to telephone Mr. Culver. After they exchange niceties, I intend to speak with him about Clarence Yates and Ruppert Kline: how we can find them, their discoveries, why they collaborated with Mr. Houghton, whether he hired them to protect Miss Waddell, and so forth. I am confident that the gentleman will be candid. He is clever enough not to incriminate himself, but prudent enough to stay on good terms with the Levesque family." Mr. Hennessy displayed a satisfied grin and savored Mr. Buchanan's pained expression.

****

I had a pleasant chat with the charming Sam Culver. Clarence Yates and Ruppert Kline are college classmates, sons of privilege, who occasionally worked for the Boston office of Alan Deschamps & Company as freelance investigators. The Peerless belongs to Mr. Kline. It's his second! Sam originally employed them to discover which owners of properties in the railroad district were willing to sell and whether Mr. Houghton had made them an offer. After the abduction of Florence Phelps following her improper incarceration by Sheriff Browning, he assigned Yates and Kline to protect her. They trained her hired hands to repel future abduction attempts. Mr. Culver paid them for their services and Florence allowed them to stay at her farm. They continued their employment until 1916, which at that time they decided to join the war. He did not know for what country but certainly with our eventual allies. Both sustained battle wounds and returned in the late summer of 1918. They went to the Phelps farm for the Peerless. At the time, Mr. Culver and Mr. Cowan came to an agreement concerning the sale of the cotton works. Its equipment was wearing out after constant use, and he acquired a facility more conveniently located to supply cotton to his mills. This was about a month before Mr. Mallet announced the closing of the Port Unity works. After the labor unrest, Mr. Culver assigned Yates and Kline to assist Gilbert Lawson, Mr. Cowan's company detective. It was then that Michael Shaw paid a visit to Mr. Mallet at his office. They had a prolonged argument over some past business deal. Shortly thereafter, several suspicious men started haunting the environs of the cotton works. Mr. Kline followed them to the Mariners' Groggery. Shaw's hires were sailors and longshoremen, none with experience in surveillance, some lasting only a few days on the job. During the week of the Armistice, Mr. Shaw lost his temper with the woman sketch artist who sits in the Walnut Café drawing patrons' portraits. That's Lydia Rochelle! He snatched away her drawing and ripped it to shreds. A few days later, he attempted to drag a woman into his car behind Lavinia Hall's house, across from the gate of the cotton works. Mr. Mallet came to her aid, disregarding Lawson's instructions to wait for his men to escort him to the Southside Hotel, his residence after early morning visitors vandalized his Commerce Street home. During the brawl, Shaw pulled a revolver, punched Mr. Mallet in the stomach, and then promised to settle scores later. He drove off. Lawson's men arrived to assist Mr. Mallet. They tried to persuade him to file a report with the sheriff, but he refused.

After Mr. Culver acquired the cotton works property in late December, he no longer needed the services of Yates and Kline. For a while, they worked for Jane, who wanted them to investigate the disappearance of Arthur Mallet after the sheriff abandoned his investigation in early February. She was friends with Arthur but rejected his proposal of marriage because she was raising young Miles. At some point, Clarence Yates decided protecting Emma was more important. They were on their own.

Mr. Culver had no idea that Yates and Kline cross lines into Mr. Houghton's camp, but he sensed they returned from the war changed. From early March onward, they were on a personal crusade. Sam and Jane heard no more from them, nor do they know their whereabouts. They have yet to return to the Boston office and he didn't expect they would. Toward the end of our conversation, Mr. Culver remarked that Yates and

Kline had the skills to gather intelligence behind enemy lines, sabotage their equipment, disrupt communications, and handle explosives. In closing, he said Clarence uncovered something disturbing about Arthur to cause him to end their work for Jane. He refused to tell her the particulars, but it has something to do with a business in Charleston.

When I reported the alarming particulars of my conversation to Mr. Buchanan, he was speechless. Mr. Hennessy took charge.

"Lydia is across the street working. Let's speak with her." If you don't recall, the company frequently employs Lydia to make illustrations for publications, and several of her delightful watercolors grace the walls of the station restaurant. In addition, Mr. Hennessy occasionally employs her when witnesses described the appearance of a suspected wrongdoer. She lives in a small room on the fourth floor of the original wing of the Railroad Hotel and works in the kitchen of its dining hall.

Upon entering the hotel, Mr. Hennessy asked the manager whether we could speak with Miss Rochelle. He told us she had twenty minutes remaining before her break, but we could take a seat and have our lunch in the dining hall while waiting. Their roast beef special was on the day's menu, so I persuaded the boss to try it. Fabulous! When Miss Rochelle came out to join us, she was all smiles. After we asked her about the man who ripped up her drawing she became extremely upset, more accurately, fearful. Michael Shaw attempted to abduct Lydia at gunpoint several days following his tantrum over her drawing his picture without asking permission. She resisted after he ordered her to get into his automobile. That's when Arthur Mallet rushed to her defense. She escaped, running back to the safety of the Railroad Hotel. Having drawn her assailant's face before, Lydia redrew it from memory, a skill she refined because capturing a moment in time is her style. Since November she had not ventured outside the hotel for fear of "Demon Pete snatching her." We assured her Michael Shaw was not Demon Pete and the sheriff wanted to bring him in for questioning. So, was Lydia willing to speak with Sheriff Smallwood? If we brought him by after her shift ended at five, she was willing to show him her drawing. We would be there, too. Mr. Hennessy then asked her to fetch her sketch book so we could photograph her drawing, promising to safeguard it until we returned at five o'clock.

****

The drawing of Michael Shaw was rich in detail, a quality typical for all Miss Rochelle's work. It also included a note at the bottom of the sheet describing him and a narrative of his crime. If she went missing, Lydia wanted somebody to give it to Mr. Hennessy. The image of the man before us was that of an ordinary-looking middle-aged man with a receding hairline having hints of gray. He is average height and stocky. The only unusual feature of his face was puffy cheeks and a tiny "cherub" mouth. After taking Lydia's statement he persuaded her to press charges for assault and attempted kidnapping. Ah-ha, now his investigation lurched forward!

Thursday morning's Messenger placed Lydia's drawing on the front page along with the headline "Wanted for Assault and Attempted Kidnapping." The accompanying article stated that Sheriff Smallwood obtained an arrest warrant for the "unidentified man" for those crimes, and he wanted to question him about other unsolved cases including the disappearance of Arthur Mallet, the sinking of a tug belonging to Hall Shipbuilding Company, and the armed ambush of deputies at Sandyfield Cutoff.

Mr. Hennessy decided to light a fire under Alfred Cowan. Along with mailing a copy of the newspaper article, he included a letter stating that Mr. Culver's private detectives reported that his employee Gilbert Lawson identified the wanted man as Michael Shaw, a former business partner of Arthur Mallet. Shaw also faces charges for his participation in attempting to kidnap a railroad employee on company property (actually, a few feet of company property outside the freight office, ha-ha-ha), and the chief attorney of the company would appreciate Mr. Lawson's cooperation in the investigation without obtaining it through the courts. With the letter, Mr. Hennessy included a photograph of Lydia's drawing. Mr. Buchanan muttered "You're determined to pry this open, Roscoe. Tell me what I'm missing." Mr. Hennessy removed a large bound volume from his desk. Several pieces of newspaper marked pages.

"The company archives keep the old city directories. This one is from 1906-07. On this page, we have Michael Shaw, Manager of Consolidated Cotton Brokers; residence, 515 Commerce Street; and in the advertisement section, we find his name; also, from the files of the *Messenger*, I found two articles the

paper ran on him. They keep clippings organized by name, business, and event. Careful, I promised to return them. This one features his photograph. He is a gaunt old man, bald, with a wide mustache, thin nose, and pointed chin. That is not the same man in Lydia's drawing, well, it couldn't be. Here is his obituary from 1912: 'Michael William Shaw, age seventy-two, passed away peacefully at his old family home situated on the Chesapeake. Mr. Shaw was manager of Consolidated Cotton Brokers from its opening in 1889 until Cowan Cotton & Fabric acquired the works in 1909,' and so forth. Somebody is lying to us." Mr. Buchanan carefully studied the articles and then shook his head. I cast my eyes upward to the ceiling trying to avoid interjecting "Lawson."

"Both Sam Culver and Cato Houghton said Mr. Yates said Gilbert Lawson identified Michael Shaw as Arthur Mallet's old enemy. So, Roscoe, who is the liar, Yates, or Lawson?"

"We have two second-hand accounts of what Mr. Yates said and each includes contradictions. Let see whether these details are verifiable. Myrna are you up to an afternoon of being a pest?"

"Yes, sir; you can count on me!"

"Good. Bring along your satchel and sidearm; tell the Major to take his revolver, oh, and don't forget a photograph of Lydia's drawing. Assume a dignified and serious demeanor. None of your innate silliness. Pay a visit to Emmet Hamer, Whitaker & Blackwell Wholesale Hardware, and lastly, the Mariners' Groggery. Ask about Shaw but drop something to set them on edge."

We started by visiting Emmet Hamer's warehouse. He had a variety of wonderful merchandise for sale at bargain prices! After letting us sample some quality cheese he acquired, the Major and I bought a wheel of it to split. He told us the drawing was not the Michael Shaw he knew. "That gentleman died years ago." The man Lydia drew introduced himself as Hiram Grady. That might be another alias, too. He was from out-of-state but didn't say where. I started out by asking how he met the man in the drawing. Mr. Hamer corrected us. There was no meeting. Grady came down upon him like a collapsing ceiling, making ridiculous demands, shoving money in his face, expecting to hire a band of thugs to help him even a score. Hamer told him to take his business elsewhere. The workers he hired out were day laborers and handymen. He threw a fit, eventually venting his rage on Lydia for drawing his picture without permission. After ripping up her sketch, he stormed out. Everybody in the Walnut Café witnessed the scene. He never saw the man again. The whole affair transpired like a summer thunderstorm, coming on unexpectedly with a terrific display and clearing out after a brief downpour. He had nothing further to add. Once again, the retelling of familiar stories includes new significant details.

Our visit to the Mariners' Groggery was a curious experience – ha-ha-ha! I was the first lady ever to set foot in that establishment but having the Major in tow dampened the mood. The bartender recognized the man in the drawing as Hiram Grady, "a big talker who employed a half-dozen men for a week to do nothing." One was sitting at a table sipping beer. Major Durant ordered him another bottle – get it while you can. Our new acquaintance said, "the pudgy hothead hired us to watch the cotton works and report back anything happening." This was during late October. It was after the labor rebellion so armed men were patrolling inside the gate. There wasn't much to see; they didn't know what to look for; and after of week watching conspicuously around the plant, their employer paid up and that was the last time anybody saw him. A longshoreman who nobody knew showed up around that time, stopped coming, and came back in the spring. He was very muscular and had a limp. About the same time, he noticed a fancy touring car driving through the South Docks. Other men noticed it and then they didn't. After that, the strange longshoreman stopped dropping in for his solitary drink for good. Other strangers showed up during the same time. Since sailors and longshoremen patronize the establishment, everybody notices strangers. I asked whether he knew Horace Clayton and P.J. Groves. He didn't. Nobody we spoke to knew them.

At Whitaker & Blackwell Wholesale Hardware everybody recognized our man in the drawing. He was the salesman from Charleston who rented the room above the store when he came to town on business. They had five-day rent receipts for him signed Hiram Grady, the earliest, October 19, 1918, the last, May 12, 1919. He drove a Dodge Brothers Model 30. As for Clayton and Groves, Mr. Blackwell knew of them because they worked for Mr. Parnell. The shop at the salvage basin is where Mr. Whitaker has his steamboat repaired. Good enough. We just spent the afternoon verifying the mundane facts common to several discoveries, altogether unremarkable. That Michael Shaw is Hiram Grady doesn't mean anything. He might

go by many names. I wonder whether our suspect also worked in cotton and textiles. That he drove from Charleston rather than come by train was curious.

The next day, Mr. Hennessy and I began by sorting through our hodge-podge of sundry verifiable facts: the man calling himself Hiram Grady assaulted and attempted to kidnap Lydia Rochelle; he rented a room over Whitaker & Blackwell Wholesale Hardware; he drove a Dodge Brothers *Model 30*; he attempted to hire thugs from Emmet Hamer to settle a score; he hired longshoremen at the Mariners' Groggery to surveil the cotton works; and he pulled a revolver on Arthur Mallet. Thus far, we assembled a body of first-hand accounts useful for the prosecution of Hiram Grady for crimes perpetrated against Lydia Rochelle and Arthur Mallet, a gift for Sheriff Smallwood. Nothing connected Grady to the failed attempts to abduct Emma Waddell.

In the afternoon, we had a meeting with Sheriff Smallwood for the purpose of sharing our findings. During the discussion, he admitted to revising his file on the Arthur Mallet disappearance case after Lydia provided her statement. It contains the letters that Annie Cowan brought to the editor of the *Messenger*. Mr. Mallet's first letter to her predates his announcement of the sale of the cotton works, the labor unrest, the vandalizing of his home, the first verified visit of Hiram Grady, and the arrival of Gilbert Lawson. The second letter describing his encounter with an adversary from the past was postmarked Thursday, November 14, 1918, the day following his brawl. That Lawson withheld his statement during the investigation puzzled Mr. Hennessy. Had third parties not transmitted fragments of his observations we would not know about Michael Shaw. Also, we wondered why Grady continued to visit Port Unity months after Mallet vanished and Sam had the cotton works demolished.

Mr. Hennessy proposed that we consider the various incidents separate until there is a clear connection. Though the sheriff might have a persuasive case against Hiram Grady for assaulting Lydia Rochelle, anything more is speculation. Annie Cowan's unhelpful letters lead nowhere, and even if Mr. Mallet named the conspirators, she doesn't have the original that Emma delivered to him. Yet, even if it survived, claiming certain individuals are participating in a conspiracy is not enough. It appears that finding out the whereabouts of Mallet or something in his possession, not the identity of the letter-writing friend of a friend motivated the attempts to abduct Miss Waddell. The second was particularly disconcerting because somebody sabotaged it. Additionally, her adventures with Yates and Kline, sleuthing with Florence Phelps, and even her safe job eavesdropping in the hall of the jail presented risks. We might be following the wrong path. Sheriff Smallwood thought the time had come to interview Florence. He recommended that Deputy Phales and I drive out to her farm.

When we spoke with Mr. Phales, he reported having received several complains from women claiming the drawing of Grady was Demon Pete. Each stated that the man attempted to force them into his automobile. The incidents spanned a range of several years. All said that they met him in one of the North First establishments. He seemed nice at first but became aggressive over time. A few days later, he attempted to abduct them off the street. Mr. Phales persuaded the women to give their statements. We were too quick to dismiss Lydia's assumption that Grady was a Demon Pete.

Emma's notebooks

Liz is back. Of the usual cast of characters visiting the "Levesque Asylum," she is the only one who descends the steps to the basement doors on the street side of the house first to see whether I am in my workshop. This entrance is well lit, has granite steps, and wide double doors for bringing in ungainly items. A pull chain rings a bell inside to let us know somebody is making a delivery. A goodly portion of the rear half of the basement contains the household machinery for heating, plumbing, and the electrics. Some of the large rooms in this section contain maintenance supplies. The front half of the basement consists of several large rooms with closets all connected by a central hallway. The door to this section is guarded by the terrifying *papier-mâché* gargoyle the McNair boys and I made as teenagers. Mrs. Keane calls it a "graven image'' of a Snallygaster. Ella installed three-bolt mortise locks on our basement doors so she and the household staff cannot stop in to sightsee and plunder. Like all the basement rooms, this section has bare brick walls and exposed ceiling beams. I use most of this space for our workshop and storage for lumber, metal, and hardware. Ella has a prop room for storing everything for our magic routines. What

brings Liz to “the girls’ playroom” is feminine camaraderie, unbecoming behavior, and relief from the oppressive heat. Her visit this evening concerned our inquiry.

“I had Emma write several long narratives describing all of her recent misadventures. This much I can say: Emma was doing fine until she began helping Florence.”

> First off, Miss Buchanan, I want to clear up one thing: I only met Mr. Arthur Mallet face-to-face once; not before, not after, just one time; long enough for me to give him a letter from Florence Phelps. I didn't know what it was about; it wasn't any business of mine, so I didn't ask. He wrote a letter to Miss Annie Cowan saying a "lady from the railroad" gave him a letter that saved his life, and she showed it to the editor of the *Messenger* newspaper. The girls in the freight office knew it was me, because I told Myrtle – she can't keep a secret – and soon enough everybody knows it was me. That's all true; it doesn't mean I knew what it was all about. That could have been a love letter. It's no secret that she was engaged to Mr. Mallet way back. Why is it that the crooks want to snatch me, and not Florence. She doesn't know what was in the letter, but her friend she doesn't want to name wrote the thing. Where is this letter anyway? That Miss Cowan has all these letters from her fellow, but not this particular one? Well, it caused me all this trouble. Yes, it sure did! There are other things that I know, but none have anything to do with Mr. Arthur Mallet. So, there! The rest? Since you're still curious, I'll put it all down in this notebook.

“Emma described several occasions of ‘snooping’ where Florence takes extraordinary risks. She was convinced that they saw bootleggers bringing a load of Laine County moonshine downriver in Lester Whitaker’s steamboat but that turned out not to be the case.”

> In 1918, it was Friday to Saturday, every other week that summer. We went tromping from Haynes Town to the railroad bridge; and from there, kept following the river. The bugs ate us up! That Florence didn’t let up for a minute! There was something burning inside her! All along, we saw the smoke from a certain steamboat, but it wasn’t until we took the mail train from Haynes to Northeast Depot on the other side of the bridge that it came into full view. There is an unobstructed overlook after following the tracks back to the abutment of the bridge. Talk about foolishness: that girl climbed up on one of the trusses! I was scared for her way up there hanging on. It was a wait, too; but after watching all those times, we knew the captain would make his way downriver Friday before sundown. Sure enough, Florence spotted him coming from way up yonder. The smoke stopped about two miles upriver. On both sides, there were lots of little nooks next to the water’s edge to hide that boat. Well, she saw smoke coming from the other direction, too, and coming from no boat! She shimmied on down that crosspiece right fast, and ran, making it off that bridge just as the express train came on. That girl is going to get herself killed! Florence did a lot of exploring when I wasn’t around, so she narrowed things down to one place, the old boatyard. The road to get there was impassable, but she found a footpath leading down to the wharves where the big steamboats in the old days used to tie up. When I arrived the following week, she was ready to take me snooping. So as to not attract attention, we both wore dark blouses. Hopefully, we could look around before the steamboat came along. Just in case, both of us were carrying our lady pistols. It wasn’t any trouble getting down there, but when we started going around to those old brick buildings, we found every last one of them padlocked. Soon enough, we saw smoke from that steamboat. Florence decided we needed to find a hiding place so we could see why he was stopping at the boatyard rather than going on downriver to the town. The best place for us was back near the footpath, so we could run away into the woods if necessary. That’s where we went: a patch of scrub at the tree line that served good enough for a blind. The steamboat arrived just as we hunched down. There were two young rough-looking fellows helping the captain. After they tied off, the boys started unloading wooden crates onto the wharf. That went on and on; and little by little, the smoke coming out of the flue began to thin. Nobody was stoking it. That meant they intended to stay. We were in a predicament. Around twilight, we heard the putter-putter of a gasoline motor. A little boat arrived, tied off to the dock, the boys started handing down some crates, and they were off.

> Another little boat arrived, and several others after it. The captain set out kerosene lanterns as it was getting dark. Over the course of the next few hours, boats of all sorts paid a visit, and took off with their crates. Towards midnight, they stopped for the day. The crew climbed back into the steamboat, but they didn't stoke up the boiler. They were staying till morning! Uh-oh; we were stuck! Florence didn't have a light for us to see our way back; and if she brought one along, there was no way to use it with those fellows out there. After things started getting quiet on the boat, Florence whispered that it might be best to tippy toe back in the direction of the path. If we made it a little way into the trees, we could carefully feel our way foreword back to County Highway. So, we did that! Well, we tried to do that. Holding hands, we felt our way in the dark, carefully leading with the toes of our boots to make sure we didn't stray from the ruts. This was awfully slow going! Eventually, we happened onto a clearing that wasn't supposed to be there – lost! It was only when we heard the whistle of a freight train did it occur to me that the path split off somewhere and ran alongside the river on the high ground. So, we huddled together, waiting for it to get light. Now, I've slept outside at night before, and I suppose she did, too. There are no critters out that are going to eat you, except, the mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers, and fleas. I didn't feel much like sleeping because the excitement kept me all worked up. Florence took cat naps. When light came, we brushed the pine needles off, and waited to see the smoke. After the puffs started rising up, we heard the old engine chugging. The way was safe!

"The following Friday, the deputies waiting at the boatyard dock didn't find the anticipated shipment of moonshine when the steamboat tied off. It should have ended there but the two adventuresome ladies became friends."

"Sheriff Smallwood has yet to explain why he allowed Emma to help Florence."

"It's obvious, Myrna: big sister Lavinia told him to keep an eye on her maniacal kinswoman. *The Family* looks after their own. That said, it didn't work out for Emma."

"The letter?"

"Yes. Take a look at this entry. Emma's recounting of her captivity on the tugboat is the only instance where she has the opportunity to speak with her would-be abductors."

> Sheriff Bert had Deputy Wilkes follow me to and from the freight office. In between, I didn't leave Lavinia's house. Sure enough, the time came when this man came up on me outside the freight office. I pulled my lady pistol on him! Ha! Deputy Wilkes popped out of nowhere and chased the fellow. They ended up shooting it out in the alleyway behind the Railroad Hotel. That rascal ended up dead with a bullet through his face! See, there comes a point when you stop being scared of things. Anyway, a couple of weeks later, they tried again. This time, Deputy Wilkes wasn't on the ball. Actually, that's not fair because Lucy got out and I set off to find her. Five bruisers with side arms led by a skinny boy wearing baggy overalls, red collarless shirt, and a faded brown cloth cap rounded the corner of Rose and Second as I approached from the opposite direction. The boy pointed me out. "There she is!" They rushed up and crowded around me. The head bruiser asked whether I was really Emma Waddell. "The last time I checked. Who are you?" He said they were "special constables" sent to take me into custody. Well, Florence told me all about these fellows. "Where's your badges?" So, they had badges. He told me to come along and not make a fuss. What else could I do? We walked down Rose two blocks to Whitaker's dock to their rickety old steamboat. Once onboard, they tied my hands behind my back with some cord. No handcuffs? Some constables! I can loosen ropes if you give me a few minutes. On the off chance they had a pair, I wasn't letting on. Florence spent a couple days in a pitch-dark cellar, hands locked up without food and water. More or less, that's what I expected. The head bruiser barked out. "Where's the captain? We need to get going!" No captain; no crew: they were in a fix because not a one of them knew how to get the boat running. He grabbed my arm, marched me into the wheelhouse, and had me sit on the floor while he tried to get his fellows to build up some steam. By this time, working my cords gave me enough slack but I waited for the right moment to slip free. Diving into the river was on my mind. After a while, the big man came back! He wanted to know who wrote the letter I delivered to Arthur Mallet. "Did Boss Griggs put you up to this? You just tell that stinker that he

might as well bring out his cleaver and cut off my head, because I'm not saying a thing!" Florence said Joe would have our heads served up on a dinner platter if he discovered what she had. This bruiser said they didn't work for Boss Griggs. "Well, I'm not talking to you either! I suppose you want my head, too?" He wasn't going to do that. Instead, they had other plans, like keeping me in a tomb until "Mallet's lady" is ready to turn over the loot. "What are you talking about? In case you haven't noticed, you're not going anywhere without a crew to run this antique tub. Who came up with this plan? Hasn't your boss heard about automobiles. We could be halfway to the county line by now! What do you know about running a steamboat?" He thought I needed cooling off. After taking me on deck, he told his pals to stuff me into a canvas sack, tie up the end, and throw me overboard with a rope attached! Splash, I hit the water hard, but the sack didn't fill up right away, so I slipped those cords as fast as I could; then, started working my hand up through the tied opening. As water started getting in, and I started going under, the sack was filling up on me! I was scared! Finally, the knot slipped off, and I was out in the river, just a swimming as hard as I could. I was a good distance off when the boiler blew up – boom! It felt like somebody clubbed me with a fence post! All this wood came raining down, so I dived under! When I popped up for air, there were my boys Adam and John in this tiny boat! Late again! They are supposed to be looking out for me! Through the cloud of smoke hanging over the water, Chester was waiting on the dock. Things were on fire! Eventually, we dashed back to Lavinia's house making our way through the growing crowd of gawkers. When Sheriff Bert came by, he said that I needed to go into hiding for a while. The safest place he had was the cells for special prisoners at the county farm. That was fine by me! It was a whole lot better than anything coming my way otherwise, so Sheriff Bert drove me to the courthouse jail to sign some papers. In no time, Matron Cole fitted me out with a jail dress and pair of "bracelets." It wasn't playacting this time. I was a real prisoner! Sheriff Bert said it was voluntary, but Matron Cole thought there was no point thinking about it until he worked out arrangements. Going back to Port Unity or my daddy's farm was impossible; and on top of that, I was a witness. Anyway, my stay would last a month, six weeks at most. Once inside the jail wagon, I settled down and tried not to think about anything until the next morning.

The skinny boy in overalls and red shirt was a local collaborator, a necessary participant in the conspiracy. Mr. Yates' claim that the plotters employed the "special constables" to take Emma prisoner appears to be accurate. Likewise, his statement that Mallet's "valuable something" – the "loot" – is the reason why the plotters wanted her. Finally, we have a motive! Who is "Mallet's lady?" Is it Florence, Jane, Annie, or another behind the curtain?

A reply from Lawson

Mr. Hennessy received a telephone call from Gilbert Lawson. The gentleman who visited Arthur Mallet twice in October was Michael Dennis Shaw, an employee of the Consolidated Cotton works in Wayne City. He is middle-aged, thin, and drives a 1912 Pierce-Arrow. The gate guard logged the purpose of his visit as a business meeting. That is all Lawson knew about the man at the time. Nevertheless, he did some research to appease us. Michael Dennis Shaw worked as a broker at the Tidewater Branch of Cowan & Son before accepting a position with Consolidated Cotton. His uncle, the deceased Michael William Shaw, also worked for the same company. The man in Lydia's drawing is Hiram Grady, Mr. Mallet's former partner in a short-lived venture. Grady is erratic, hot-tempered, and delusional. He lives off an inheritance, having never earned an honest day's wages. Grady is not a salesman, and he doesn't live in Charleston. However, he drives a Dodge Brothers *Model 30* – who doesn't? The gate guard denied his request for a meeting with Mr. Mallet. Thereafter, he made a pest of himself, haunting the environs of the cotton works. After he and Arthur Mallet had a brawl outside the Second Street gate, Grady never returned. Mr. Mallet let the matter go, excusing his actions as insanity. So, assaulting Miss Rochelle wasn't a crime because Grady is insane?

Clarence Yates made a mistake: both Shaw and Grady were in Port Unity at the same time. Cato Houghton and Sam Culver provided us with different versions of hearsay narratives built upon those errors. Finally, Mr. Hennessy assumed there could only be one Michael Shaw who worked for Consolidated Cotton. Even agile minds can assemble convincing fictions from an assortment of disconnected facts.

Mr. Lawson provided us with the name of another witness who encountered both Micheal Shaw and Hiram Grady during their visits to the cotton works. It was Jesse Grantham, foreman of the compress crew. After the works closed, he took a job with Hall Shipyard as a mechanic. It should be easy to find him. Lawson added that Grantham warned Arthur in advance about the agitators' plot to take over the offices.

It amazes me that none of the individuals on the periphery of the sheriff's investigation came forward to volunteer useful leads. Why wasn't he pushing them. Mr. Buchanan thinks he is reluctant to expose *The Family* to unwanted public scrutiny. Lavinia, Emma, Florence, Jane, Sam, Sheriff Smallwood, and his wife Clarisse belong to this clan. I have my doubts. What about Alfred Cowan and Lawson? It's obvious to me that the sheriff still thinks the disappearance of Arthur Mallet is a separate case from the attempts to abduct Emma. He is convinced that the latter is the result of her entanglement with Florence. Alrighty, let's find out.

Florence Phelps

Here we go! Bumping along at full throttle on County Highway with Deputy Tom Phales is an invigorating way to start the day. I was ready for more novel experiences. A conversation with a real-life "maniacal and occasionally dangerous" woman might do, if we made it to her farm in one piece. We were bringing along both sets of Dr. Cordell's photographs to see whether she recognized any of them. Upon arriving at the Phelps farm, three men with rifles met us. That Deputy Phales brought me puzzled them.

"Who's she, Tom?"

"Settle down, nothing's changed. Sheriff Bert is working with the railroad to catch the ringleaders. My lady passenger is the top railroad detective." I smiled. "She wants to ask Florence some questions."

"Well, what's keeping you?"

Deputy Phales continued up the drive, and then parked out of view behind the barn. From every corner, the barrels of sundry firearms bore down on us. Once he stepped out of his automobile and waved his hat, they disappeared from sight. Immediately, the rear door of the main house flew open and out stormed Florence, shotgun at the ready. What have I blundered into this time? Mr. Phales opened my door and helped me out.

"Howdy, Florence. This is Hennessy's top railroad detective Myrna Levesque." She snarled.

"Where's Emma?"

"Our girl is safe so don't get worked up about nothing."

"Alright, so what about me?"

"If your private army is not enough, I can send over Chester Wilkes."

"No! He's dangerous!" Ha-ha-ha! "Come inside and bring your detective lady friend. "It's about time we settled this." Florence brought us into her daddy's study. After placing her shotgun on the desk, she unlocked the closet, removed several boards from the floor, and lifted out a lockbox. "See this! Everything inside is trouble. My daddy started it, and I added the rest." She unlocked the box, removed a ledger, and handed it to Deputy Phales. "Take this." He paged through it, groaned, handed it to me, cleared his throat, and then pondered Florence's grin.

"That's Boss Griggs' secret payroll. How did you get it?"

"A little old-style bargaining, nothing more."

"With whom?"

"A certain party who wants to remain anonymous." He shook his head. "I acquired the ledger before the end of the war hoping to get even with Griggs. Worthless: it's nothing more than a book of names and amounts for what you can only guess; no way to connect it to the old devil or the bookkeeper. They were sly operators all around. Eventually, those who enjoyed his patronage in the past went over to the rival camps. After somebody finished off Joe there was no point in continuing my quest. I want to sell this place and live my life."

"So, you claim the ledger is worthless? It's a directory of rogues across the factions. The party who has it can coerce or buy any of them."

"Set it aside for now. I have something much better." Florence removed two sheets of paper from her Pandora's Box and handed them to us. What? Signed statements from Horace Clayton and P.J. Groves? "They're here. Clarence and Ruppert rescued them. They're alive."

The statements describe how Mr. Parnell hired the men to take the steam tug from the layup basin to Unity Bluff on April 17. They had some cut wood at Sics Landing to make the distance. Upon arriving there, they found the cords stacked in two rows at the slip. Nobody was around to help them load. It took them a long time to accomplish the task. All the while, they had to maintain steam and keep an eye on the level in the boiler. They carried enough to make it downstream the full distance with the help of the current but intended to stop at Haynes Town dock for water. By the time they built up enough pressure to cast off, Mr. Arless from the Hall Shipyard drove up in his truck. There were two men standing on its bed, each with a duffel bag. He told Clayton and Groves that his men would take the tug the rest of the way. That help arrived too late for the strenuous part was a bit perturbing. The replacement crew immediately cast off. Arless drove Clayton and Groves to the abandoned icehouse to wait on the dock for a boat to take them back upriver and then he left them. Two shabby men with guns emerged from the scrub. They wore broad kerchiefs over their faces like bandits. After tying up Clayton and Groves, the wasters took them inside the compressor room. Before locking them inside, one of the men told them that Parnell "ought to know better than make deals behind a partner's back." A half-hour later, they heard somebody outside hammering. Eventually Clarence and Ruppert broke in and freed them.

"Max Arless and his hirelings appear to be the likely culprits who blew up the tug." Alrighty, I guessed right: different factions perpetrated each attempt to abduct Emma, two of them preferred having her alive. It was my turn to ask questions. "We suspected as much. What does Emma know that all these murderous parties need to find out?"

"Let me sort this out for you. Emma doesn't know anything, except that I gave her a letter to deliver to Arthur. Jane gave it to me, but she knows nothing about its contents; however, she said Cowan's spies must not see me deliver it. That's impossible for many reasons so I recruited Emma. Before you ask, Jane seriously considered marrying Arthur. After having to step up to raise Miles, their romance faltered. That does not mean they didn't remain close."

"What about you?"

"Let's say Arthur and I remained friends despite our differences and leave it at that. Chester was more to my liking but together we'd die sooner. You two seem well-matched. That is, if Tom could lose twenty years."

"So, tell us about his other steadfast admirer… The Lady."

"No-no-no, you are straying too far afield. Arthur was long-gone before she took the reins."

"Who is she?" Florence tightened her lips and shook her head. "Find out for yourself. I'm not sinking deeper." I had a few more questions for Florence.

"Who is Hiram Grady?"

"Ruppert had a chat with Jesse Grantham, the foreman of the cotton works. He said Grady threw a fit about a payment due him from years back. After that, the guard at the gate turned him away. Clarence described Grady as 'an obsessive middle-aged spoiled brat with enough money to fail at anything.'"

"What do you think happened to Arthur?"

"I have no idea. You'll find the notes Clarence and Ruppert left me along with documents my daddy assembled on the various questionable activities of the late Joe Griggs and his cronies, most of them deceased. The sheriff can have all of it. I'm done! Unless you have just cause to arrest me, I'll take my leave. Mr. Simpson and a few fellows will fetch our guests and follow you back to the courthouse."

"One more question: who are the turncoats at the prison farm?"

"Nat and Sally Moore, you'll find them in Clarence's notes and also the ledger: after spying for Boss Griggs, they switched sides to the Laine County bootleggers. Sally told Clarence that they answered to Clyde Parnell. They took her for a ride in their Peerless." Florence grinned. "That's some automobile! The

big man over everything is Laine County Commissioner Willard Grimes but good luck proving it. He has connections."

"Did you know that the dead men from the tug explosion claimed to be 'special constables' like those who abducted you?"

"Hmm, then the game is getting more dangerous." Deputy Phales handed her Dr. Cordell's photographs of all eleven dead men. After examining each closely, she separated three from the pile, all 'pirates."

"These three participated in my abduction. Clarence and Ruppert watched Lavinia's house. They noticed somebody else watching, too."

"A skinny boy wearing baggy overalls, red collarless shirt, and a faded brown cloth cap?"

"It's a woman. The fellows followed her to Mrs. Holbrook's on Mulberry. I boarded there six weeks while working for Blackwell & Whitaker. The little imp went into the old brick privy behind the house a boy and came out a mature woman. In the back of my mind, I think I saw that red shirt before the 'special constables' took me. Even teenaged boys dress better than that. Be on the lookout for red shirts, Miss Levesque. You're worth a whole lot more than anything Arthur could have squirreled away."

Our haul for the day overwhelmed Sheriff Smallwood. He immediately arranged a meeting with the county prosecutor. Horace Clayton, P.J. Groves, and the lockbox disappeared behind closed doors. I placed a telephone call to Mr. Hennessy to report the unexpected developments. He and Mr. Buchanan arrived within fifteen minutes. Sheriff Smallwood emerged briefly to tell us to wait outside the room until they needed us. That turned into two hours; and when he came out, he told us to go home.

****

Hello again! Florence's trove of evidence wasn't as damning as she thought but it was enough to put her in danger or doom the next round of kidnappers. The prosecutor determined that the coveted "secret payroll" was inadmissible because Florence obtained it improperly. The secret files of Judge Ezra Phelps documenting the corrupt administration of the deceased Dick Browning merely bolstered a moot conclusion. Sheriff Smallwood uncovered the same and more after the assassin shot Judge Phelps. The prosecutor concentrated his efforts upon the testimony of Clayton and Groves. Max Arless faced multiple charges connected to "the theft and unauthorized operation of a steam vessel belonging to the Hall Shipyard Company" and kidnapping Clayton and Groves, not Emma. He charged Clyde Parnell with filing a false report. The tug was not stollen from the layup basin and Hall Shipyard filed a civil lawsuit against him for loss of company property "misappropriated for personal use" resulting in "related damages." Needless to say, the company fired him. After confessing to stealing the tug with the intention to sell its antique engine, Mr. Arless turned in the men working for him to get his charges reduced, and the "backwoods boys" who locked Clayton and Groves in the ice factory skirted kidnapping charges by tattling on some of their moonshiner friends who "do business" with Parnell. It might have gone further had he not disappeared. All denied any connection to the abduction plot and those who perpetrated it. Without concrete evidence to the contrary, it worked. The prosecutor considered the question of the five dead men known as the "pirates" and Emma's abduction a separate case to be address later for several reasons: the official report by the harbor patrol and state authorities on the cause of the explosion was inconclusive; Florence identified three of the "pirates" who attempted to operate the steamboat as "special constables" who participated in her abduction; the authorities determined the unidentified dead men were outsiders; and an accounting of all local inventories of explosives showed no inconsistencies. Since the Arless' crew neglected to top-off the water at Haynes Town Landing, a defense attorney might argue that the water level in the boiler was dangerously low after travelling the extra distance from Unity Bluff to the North Docks, in addition to the pirates' over-stoking. That is the same reason why the cause remains unsettled regardless of whether explosives were onboard.

Sheriff Smallwood had Clayton and Groves sign themselves into protective custody so they might be around to testify. Sally Moore's husband Nat disappeared. He was the next link in the chain leading to those behind the abduction plots and more. Finally, the investigation notes of Yates were inadmissible. An interesting twist: the attorney representing the estate of Joe Griggs challenged all claims that the ledger

containing the secret payroll belonged to the deceased. Even so, Sheriff Smallwood compiled a list of suspected turncoats from the entries.

Since our meeting with Florence, Mr. Buchanan suspended our inquiry pending the conclusion of the various trials. Even then, he has little hope that the investigation into the abduction plots will progress further. Mr. Hennessy was pleased with my work! For the time being, I am continuing my training with Major Durant.

Mallet's loot

During the past few weeks, I assisted Ella and Captain Johnston in the Office of Station Police. This morning, the boss called me back to corporate headquarters to resume my inquiry. Several noteworthy developments occurred during the past few days.

Tim Pait, a farmer in Laine County, reported finding an abandoned Dodge Brothers *Model 30* in the woods behind his fields. Sheriff Jackson told Sheriff Smallwood that he discovered some curious papers and items inside including a small carved wooden chest containing a revolver, and a small quantity of cash. There is also a hand-drawn map of a section of North Front showing the environs of Lavinia Hall's house and the cotton works. Obviously, it predates the demolition of the plant. Sheriff Smallwood is sending Deputy Phales to make an examination.

Mr. Buchanan informed us that Jesse Grantham told Sheriff Smallwood that the "hothead" who assaulted Miss Rochelle was trying to extort money from Mr. Mallet. He came to the cotton works several times last October. Mr. Grantham overheard Grady raging from outside Mr. Mallet's office. "I want my fair share! You owe it to me! Settle up or suffer the consequences!" Grady then flung open the door and stormed off. That was it. Mr. Grantham didn't think much about it until the *Messenger* printed Lydia's drawing. Even then, the face looked familiar, but he couldn't place it. The sheriff then asked Grantham whether he thought somebody was responsible for Mallet's unexplained disappearance. He thought not. Alfred Cowan was pushing his company to the verge of bankruptcy. After he fulfilled wartime contracts, servicing the existing debt for several ill-advised acquisitions was the only priority. Even at maximum production, the company was breaking even. Arthur told him that Cowan build his company on pillaging. He bought a mill, never spent a dime on upkeep, ran it into the ground, and then sold the land and equipment to service debt on his latest acquisition. Arthur saw the end coming and was ready to break ties with Cowan. Furthermore, he did not want to marry Annie. Grantham thought the man deliberately went missing. How? He had no idea.

Liz's only assignment at this time is helping Mr. Buchanan build a case against Arthur Mallet. Upon returning in early June, she quietly resumed her "inquiry" into this devious missing passenger. No wonder Mr. Hennessy did not want me to become fixated with "letters or letters about letters or unsubstantiated rumors of conspiracies." He sensed it was deception from the start because all the evidence that Liz uncovered initially supported that conclusion. Our work on the abduction attempts eventually revealed Mallet's motivation.

Regarding Liz's side of this "inquiry," she telephoned the offices of one of the professional organizations to which Arthur Mallet belonged. He first appears on their membership rolls in 1902 as a partner in the firm of Mallet & Grady, a cotton brokerage in Charleston. Grady was not on the membership list. In 1904, Mr. Mallet was the sole owner of the business. He worked in the offices of Rhodes Cotton Gin & Seed Oil Company in 1905; and thereafter, an employee of Cowan Cotton & Fabric. The organization prints booklets of their annual meetings for the membership, and they include group photographs of those attending. The representative offered to send Liz those booklets where Arthur Mallet appears. Finally, she asked about the elder Michael Shaw. Yes, he was a member from 1889 through 1908.

Over the ensuing weeks, Liz received several envelops from another professional association further south containing publications with portrait photographs, biographical notes, and group photographs of members, the earliest published in 1896. A studio photographer enshrined a certain Michael Shaw's visage: he is younger than the deceased manager of the former Consolidated Cotton Brokers cotton works. The text accompanying it lauded the man's achievements as a manager for Cowan & Son Cotton, later Cowan Cotton & Fabric. He graduated from Dapple Ridge Military Academy, Class of '92. She was unable to discover anything about this institution because it no longer exists, nor was it open for long. Mr. Grady and Mr. Mallet appear together in group photographs for 1903 through 1907 booklets. Curiously, the latter only appeared in subsequent group photographs with other Cowan Cotton & Fabric management. The two men are the Arthur Mallet we knew and Hiram Grady in Lydia's drawing. The deceased Michael Shaw is the only man for which we obtained official documents confirming his identity. Earlier this week, Mr. Hennessy received an envelope containing a 1900 Cowan & Son publication with a group photograph that included the younger Michael Shaw. In his letter, Mr. Cowan stated that he did not know Mr. Shaw personally. Additionally, he enclosed an 1897 Cowan & Son publication that included another picture of Shaw. In a group photograph of the "Tidewater Branch Office" brokers on another page of the same publication, Liz saw a face that look familiar on the second row. The text at the bottom of the page listing the names gave his as Hiram Grady. What? In a telephone conversation with Gilbert Lawson, Mr. Buchanan confirmed that both Michael Shaw and Hiram Grady worked for Cowan & Son during the 1890s, but both left the company in 1901. They were never employees of Cowan Cotton & Fabric and Mr. Lawson didn't know them personally. He said it would take some time searching through the old company records to find out more about them. Where were we? The younger Michael Shaw and Hiram Grady worked for Cowan & Son in the 1890s; group photographs taken during the 1900s for one association shows Shaw and Mallet together; and somebody, neither Shaw nor Grady nor Arthur, appears in group photographs in three booklets of another association as Arthur Mallet. Who is he? Liz said it was like trying to make her way through a house of mirrors. Mr. Hennessy remarked that none of these pieces of "evidence" she assembled were official documents. Errors in such hastily assembled publications are commonplace. Still, he could not see the management of Cowan Cotton & Fabric tolerating "name swapping" unless there was a company sanctioned conspiracy to commit fraud. He speculated that the 1897 "Tidewater Branch Office" photograph including Hiram Grady was indeed Hiram Grady, that is, the man in Lydia's drawing. This does not fit with what we knew about the man thus far, namely, he lives off an inheritance, having never earned an honest day's wages. The intelligence that Clarence and Ruppert passed on is inaccurate or incomplete. Considering their methods that is understandable.

Finally, guess what happens next Monday. Ladies, you might remember H.R. 4691, Approved, August 10, 1917. No? Well, now we have H.R. 11945, Approved, November 21, 1918: *An Act To enable the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out, during the fiscal year ending June thirtieth, nineteen hundred and nineteen, the purposes of an Act entitled "An Act To provide further for the national security and defense by stimulating agriculture and facilitating the distributing of Agricultural products.*" Under the Fourth section, after June 30, 1919, and lasting through the conclusion of the war and demobilization, the sale of distilled spirits "for beverage purposes" is unlawful; and after May 1, 1919, there is a prohibition on the use of "grain, cereal, fruit, or food product" in the manufacturing of beer, wine, and so forth. Oh, let us not forget about the Eighteenth Amendment, Ratified, January 16, 1919, and going into effect on January 16, 1920. So, no sale, manufacturing, transporting, importing, exporting of "intoxicating liquors for beverage purposes"

is lawful. It does not take an expansive imagination to envision the potential for profit in bootlegging and smuggling. Today, Mr. Hennessy called a meeting in his office to discuss increasing station police patrols and adding watchman rounds at all our facilities across the line to discourage peddlers of liquor on company property. He is particularly concerned about classification yards where transactions can take place between rows of freight cars. I recommended adding more fencing. Major Durant thought that was an excellent plan for the long run, but now is a suitable time to hire more watchmen. Mr. Hennessy likes both ideas but thought our first task was determining which approach or a combination of both might be most effective. Since we were discussing a problem that might happen in the near future, he wanted the captain of station police at each depot to submit their recommendations. This is the traditional bureaucratic method. After the meeting, Mr. Hennessy wanted to speak with me.

"Deputy Phales is investigating a curious overlooked detail related to the kidnapping of Clayton and Groves. He requested your assistance. Also, he just returned from his meeting with Sheriff Jackson. You can resume your inquiry tomorrow. Major Durant assigned Seargent Quince to accompany you, assist, drive you about, and so forth indefinitely. He is the Major's pick to replace Captain Johnston whenever that happens and a suitable candidate to assume the role of Assistant Chief Inspector eventually." Hurrah! I like him. "Mr. Quince understands your convoluted approach and can keep you from straying into trouble." He sure can!

****

More news from Deputy Phales: he has reason to suspect that the Dodge Brothers *Model 30* abandoned in Laine County belonged to Hiram Grady. Sheriff Jackson told him the locked carved oak chest found on the rear seat contained the most interesting things recovered from the vehicle. It measured two feet long by one foot by one foot, obviously the work of an expert craftsman. Somebody defeated the latch with some tool or a pocketknife. Its contents included an unloaded antique revolver, fifty dollars in paper money dating from the 1890s, and a pouch of trinkets. The loose papers inside the automobile were interesting: a note giving the directions to the salvage basin, a receipt from Whitaker & Blackwell Wholesale Hardware for a rented room dated May 12, 1919, hand-drawn maps of the environs of the cotton works, and a crude sketch of the rear of the Hall house, including a note penciled in the margin "Old woman has shotgun!" How could anybody know Lavinia has a shotgun? The drawing of the rear of Lavinia's house suggests somebody sketched it from a position that only could exist after the leveling of the cotton works block. There was also a drawstring canvas pouch containing an assortment of tiny ceramic figurines, beads, assorted silver charms, paper flowers, lengths of ribbon, and miniature pastoral scenes painted on small wooden disks, all categorized by Sheriff Jackson as "worthless trinkets," but I knew first-hand their significance. This was a little girl's collection of treasures! Strange! How did that get there? It is completely out of place! Deputy Phales was at a loss. Lastly, glued to the inside of the lid was an embossed calling card belonging to Howard T. Cowan, Alfred Cowan's deceased daddy. He assumed that Howard Cowan placed the revolver and money in the chest but the receipt for room rental obviously belonged to our cherub-faced terror Grady. Sheriff Smallwood told Deputy Phales to photograph the chest and all its contents including every item in the pouch. In addition to sending copies to Alfred Cowan to determine whether the chest was stollen, he wanted to get the opinion of local merchants as to who manufactured the "trinkets" and when. That might help us settle his question as to whether somebody placed the pouch inside the chest before Grady acquired it.

Jane Deschamps

Deputy Phales wanted us to meet him in the offices of the Hall Shipyard on the South Docks. Jane Deschamps was joining us, acting on behalf of Miles Hall. She is his guardian and administrator of his father's estate, a greater portion he willed to the boy, including real estate and a sizable portfolio of shares. Amongst the diverse properties was the disused Independence Ice Company and the abandoned Hall Boatyard. The directors could put the ice company back into operation easily if somebody buys the nearby vacant meat packing plant. By contrast, the boatyard is defunct. With the exception of a stationary engine, several wooden boats in various stages of construction, and sundry items deemed to be junk, workers removed all the equipment, tools, and metal fixtures. Masons bricked up the windows on the empty buildings and the company locksmith installed hasps and padlocks on the doors. What concerned Deputy Phales and Miss Deschamps was the deputies found a set of factory-made keys for all the padlocks for both sites on one of the men who locked Clayton and Groves in the compressor room. How was that possible? There were two sets: the Hall Shipyard had one and Jane kept the other. The company secured their set in a locked cabinet and anybody using them had to sign the log maintain by the locksmith. The last person signing for them was Clyde Parnell on November 12, 1917. Clayton and Groves needed access to the stationary engine at the boatyard. He promptly returned the keys four days later. Jane kept her set in a locked key cabinet at her Chestnut Street home. Nobody has access to them. Therefore, an unauthorize set found its way into the hands of Arless. When Yates and Kline freed Clayton and Groves they attempted to pry open the lock but ended up ripping half the hasp from the door. When Sheriff Smallwood and his deputies search the Independence Ice Company in midmonth, they found the lock hanging from the broken hasp as Florence's boys left it. Deputy Wilkes took a photograph. The next day, the shipyard sent Josh Evenson, their locksmith, to repair the damage. Aside from some lubrication, the padlock was in good working order. Mr. Evenson, who assumed trespassers broke into the compressor room, became concerned upon learning that somebody locked two men inside. He explained why in detail.

"When we changed out the locks in 1909, Whitaker & Blackwell Wholesale Hardware gave us a good deal on some miscellaneous padlocks they had left over from fitting out the courthouse two decades earlier. They were heavy two-and-a-half-inch cast bronze tumbler locks with spring covers, the three-inch three-tumbler version of the same, and three-and-a-quarter inch four tumbler pad locks ordered for the cells in the courthouse jail that the contractor decided not to use. The locks open with bronze keys with warding and clefts. There were twenty-four keys per dozen, but they came in half-dozen boxes with a dozen keys. I accounted for all these extra keys. There are seven keys on Miss Deschamps' ring and seven on ours for the twenty-eight locks at the boatyard except for the large key opening the door to the pipe chamber for the drydock. That's a mortice lock and the key is on a separate ring. The same keys open the fourteen padlocks we installed on the Independence Ice Company buildings. What puzzles me is that all the keys they took off those rascals are not duplicates made from blanks. A copy never looks as good as the original. I suspect somebody didn't install a lock and two keys from each half-dozen box – five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, and three, or six boxes – twenty-eight padlocks of the same type opened with seven keys; five, ten, and four make fourteen for the ice company or minus one, minus one, and minus two from the three boxes, or six of seven keys. Deputy Phales and Sergeant Quince looked confused. "With two keys per lock set aside, we might have another unauthorized ring of keys in the hands of the evil-minded." Oh-my, something occurred to me!

"Sir, when you said miscellaneous padlocks left over from the courthouse did you mean full boxes of a half-dozen with twelve keys?"

"No, Whitaker & Blackwell delivered full and partial boxes of a half-dozen, but each full box came with a dozen keys."

"So, you had two unique keys that open only one of the six locks in a full box but the same two will also open one of the locks in another full box providing that the model number is the same."

"Yes, otherwise each ring would have forty-two keys instead of seven."

"What happened to the rest of the locks?"

"We used them here. It doesn't matter. Everybody must sign for keys."

"How many of the partial boxes did you receive?"

"The three-and-a-quarter and three-inches locks were surplus placed in the same box with their keys. The two-and-a-half-inch came in ten full boxes and three were partial. We used those for the ice factory and boatyard because we had enough locks keyed the same to get away with using the least number of keys." I pulled Deputy Phales aside.

"When you get back, it might be prudent to consult the county locksmith about what the original padlocks in the courthouse secure." After a moment, he took a deep breath and nodded. I turned my attention back to the locksmith. He continued the discussion with his recommendations.

"At modest expense, we can easily replace the entire lot of these locks with something more up to date or can switch them with others that we have in inventory. Either way, the keys of any unauthorize set would not work." Miss Deschamps was quick to come to a discission.

"That sounds fine for the Independence Ice Company since the buildings contain valuable equipment. I do not think changing the locks at the boatyard is necessary. Nothing inside is valuable except the stationary engine and it was not worth moving in 1909. If commercial vessels use the dock to distribute goods to the locals it might be advantageous to set up a store in one of the disused buildings. It would take some study to see whether the amount of traffic justifies the expense. The property is part of Miles' inheritance, so I do not want to make decisions concerning it that might not ensure a profit." My mouth dropped. "The site might be valuable for manufacturing once County Highway becomes the thoroughfare its planners predicted. Though left to the elements, the buildings are sound. Pulling them down would not discourage trespassers. That aside, the rescuers freed the men imprisoned inside the compressor room by prying off the hardware. Changing the locks would not prevent somebody from gaining entry by the same means. So, why are we here?" Deputy Phales replied.

"Ma'am, we are here investigating a crime."

"Yes, now we know why a set of unauthorized keys exists. Whitaker & Blackwell sold us the remainder of a lot taking up space in their warehouse since 1887. I can only imagine that they originally purchased it at a discount for the same reason; and continuing the practice, sold boxes to anybody who needed them. We cannot know who has another set of factory keys; likewise, it is unlikely they would be aware that their keys open locks at the boatyard. Have you considered the possibility that Whitaker & Blackwell might have several boxes on their shelves for sale to the public?" Deputy Phales exhaled.

"We are only concerned about how Mr. Arless acquired a set of factory-made keys. Now, we know. The question is whether an informed accomplice assisted him. At the moment, we suspect Clyde Parnell. He was the last person signing for the company set and they were in his possession for four days." Uh-huh, now we are on to something.

"Mr. Evenson, these keys are unusual. How easy would it be to acquire blanks to make copies?"

"Difficult, Miss Levesque; the locks are old, patented in the 1870s. It would be easier to buy an up-to-date replacement than order blanks from the manufacturer."

"That is, unless the hardware store still happens to have an unopened box of the locks collecting dust on a shelf. I think we need to pay a visit to Whitaker & Blackwell." Jane chuckled.

"It appears that Miss Levesque figured it out. Is there anything else, gentlemen?" Deputy Phales played his high card.

"Yes, Miss Deschamps, consider the damage done and five men killed as a result of this misappropriation of property. Some might argue that the owners of said property bear some responsibility for not taking reasonable measures to secure it."

"Sir, reasonable does not encompass the extraordinary. Mr. Arless confessed his crew docked the vessel and left the boiler to go cold. It was those the *Messenger* call 'pirates' who boarded it and caused the explosion. Thus far, nobody has established a connection between Mr. Arless and Mr. Parnell with these men."

"So, if you left your automobile in the drive running and somebody stole it you are not partially responsible for an accident he caused?"

"Yes, but the company had no intention of moving the vessel from the salvage basin. That was entirely Mr. Parnell's doing. As for locks, as our locksmith just explained, the manufacturers do not make every lock one-of-a-kind. It wouldn't be practical or profitable. Somebody somewhere has a key that will open another's lock. The chances of either party knowing it is next to nil. However, all of us know Whitaker & Blackwell sells boxes of locks with keys that open padlocks at the boatyard and the courthouse. They sold them gambling on the possibility that nobody would ever know about the weakness, much less exploit it. I imagine that they are not unique. Any company selling locks is doing the same thing." Brilliant! "Do you have something to add Mr. Evenson?"

"Changing them out is easy. We have enough up-to-date padlocks in inventory. None came from Whitaker & Blackwell. Also, I'll order a special lock for the gate. Nobody can bring an automobile into the boatyard unless they pry it open." Jane smiled. It was time for me to enter the fray.

"Miss Deschamps, Lester Whitaker's Northeast River Navigation Company regularly docks their steamboat at the wharf. Do you have an arrangement?"

"No. They do so without our permission. The wharf juts out in the river so we can do nothing about it."

"Then the entire boatyard is open from the river side. Anybody can camp on the grounds or wander about the array of buildings."

"Like whom?"

"Laine County bootleggers come to mind."

"Bootleggers did not steal our tug to deliver moonshine!"

"Mr. Parnell might think differently. What good is a sixty-year-old wooden hulled sidewheeler powered by a wood burning crosshead engine? The shipyard couldn't use it to pull a barge of scrap metal to Unity Bluff, but its maneuverability in the coves and shallows of the river made it ideal for liquor running. So, why did Mr. Parnell tell Clayton and Groves to take it downriver to unity bluff? I don't think they are telling us the full story. They were transporting a cargo of moonshine."

"Indeed, Miss Levesque! That sounds like a good motive for hanging on to it… or not."

"So, have you spoken with Florence lately?"

"Yes, she claims Lester Whitaker transports moonshine and docks at the wharf to break bulk. I'm surprised she wanders over there alone. My uncle and his men raided his boat and found

nothing but crates of produce. It was an embarrassment with political complications. Florence is not right in the head, so the Whitakers let it go. Where are you going with this?"

"Your private detectives Yates and Kline saved Emma Waddell from the 'pirates.' They know exactly when and where to be and who had a fast little gasoline-powered boat they could rent. Mr. Yates told Emma that they work for "The Lady." Is that you?"

"Those two are completely mad since they came back from the war. They worked for Sam; and then, inexplicably left his employment. We had best continue this conversation elsewhere. Come to my house in an hour and I'll tell what I know."

The Letter

The Alan Deschamps House is located on the half-block on Sixth Street between Dock and Church in the Southside. It is one of those overly elaborate Queen Anne Style mansions, replete with pickelhaube turrets, bay windows, and wrap around porch. Our meeting reconvened in the downstairs library. Immediately, Jane pointed to a ring of keys on the table.

"Lavinia gave me these. She said that they open the padlocks at the boatyard." On examining the keys, I immediately recognized them as belonging to mortise locks.

"Miss Deschamps, these keys do not open padlocks. Mrs. Hall gave you the wrong ring."

"How would she know? When Captain Hall had his accident, these were the only keys found in his office. He carried a set of the essential shipyard keys on his person."

"Who packed up his office things and sent them to Lavinia?"

"Mr. Arless."

"Now, we know. There isn't another set of factory-made keys. He kept Captain Hall's ring for the padlocks."

"So, there is no need to change them?"

"Mr. Evenson just told us he had better locks in inventory. He can use the old padlocks on something at the shipyard. You have watchmen patrolling the grounds. That makes up the difference."

"Alright! Please take a seat. I have something to show you." She opened a cabinet, removed a carved oak chest, and then placed it upon the table. "Florence doesn't know about this. All the fuss over the letter is complete nonsense. In early September, Arthur asked me to meet a lawyer named Walter Pierce at the station. He couldn't do it himself because Lawson had his men watching, and his former partner was a deranged fiend who wanted to settle scores. Mr. Pierce stayed long enough to load two valuable parcels into my automobile. However, Mr. Pierce said Arthur could start a new life anywhere. He left on the next northbound express. I have no idea what they contain. Arthur had the only key to the chests. When Mr. Grady began threatening Arthur, I placed one of the boxes in safekeeping with Lavinia. I informed him of the change using the shipyard message boy. That's what I should have done with the first letter. He retrieved it from her in early January, but not wanting to carry it into the cars, he removed the contents, placing them in a portmanteau. I was expecting he would return for this but now it seems unlikely. Now, I want Uncle Bert to take care of it. Miles' safety comes first." I removed the pack of lockpicks from my boot.

"May I open it?"

"Can you? I mean, without damaging it?"

"I sure can." It only took a moment. Deputy Phales and Phillip watched over my shoulder. Once I lifted the lid we beheld stacks of bonds, most had already matured. All were bearer bonds,

meaning that anybody having the instrument in hand could redeem them. Deputy Phales found a card pasted inside the lid, "Howard T. Cowan." He frowned.

"We found the twin to this one in Grady's automobile. Unfortunately, no sign of the man. The contents of the chest included an antique revolver (certainly belonging to Grady), some money, and a little pouch of trinkets. Miss Levesque thinks it is a collection of pretty things belonging to a little girl. If there was a fortune in bonds in that box Arthur took it. I think the time has come for us to show Lavinia some pictures."

"Do these trinkets include little round painted scenes on wood?"

"Yes!"

"The pouch belongs to Lucy. She collected all those things when she was a child. I can't imagine her letting go of it." I interjected.

"Let's find out after we take care of this mess. If I understand you right, Miss Deschamps, you want to pass this nightmare off on Sheriff Smallwood because you have what everybody wants. There are certain things that do not fit together. How could anybody know Lavinia has a shotgun? How could the 'special constables' or Laine County bootleggers know anything about Arthur's secret cache of bonds?

Jane had an answer for both questions. Somebody on Lavinia's household staff is spying on her and the only person who knew about the bonds was Hiram Grady. I recall how he was unable to hire thugs in this county, so somebody introduced him to the Laine County bosses. I suspect Grady outlived his usefulness. The gears of my mind started grinding away.

"Did you see Arthur Mallet in Port Unity in early-January?"

"No. He stayed long enough to get his goods and purchase a ticket on the afternoon train."

"Who told you this?"

"Emma Waddell brought me a letter, though Lavinia penned it after he left. As for the empty chest, I imagine Lavinia gave it to Lucy."

"This happened the Second of January?"

"Yes, it was a transaction in passing. I doubt whether he'll risk returning for the rest."

"Both chests have the card of Howard Cowan pasted inside the lid. Did he steal these bonds?"

"Until this moment, I did not know what this chest contained. Certainly, an attorney would not pass on stolen goods. Furthermore, that is merely a calling card. It does not say "Property of Howard T. Cowan." Let my uncle determine who owns what."

"After all these months, why haven't you told him about Arthur's visit, Walter Pierce, and the chests?"

"Lavinia said she would take care of it. I was apt to stir up a scandal like my mother and loose custody of Miles. In the end, I know no more about what happened to Arthur than you."

"When did Mr. Yates and Mr. Kline start working for Lavinia."

"After Emma's fiancé Ned had an accident. A few days before, he caught some outsiders beating one of his men in the yards. Ned took an axe handle to the hoodlums, leaving the chief ruffian with a broken hand. He vowed revenge."

"Yes, I know. Ned never reported the encounter. Hitherto, nobody has fully explained Emma's place in the scheme of things. She worked in the freight office, provided companionship for Lucy, and assisted Sheriff Smallwood. What else?"

"Her great-grandmother was a Smallwood; and as you might expect, her line includes Phelps and Culver women. Florence and Clarisse Smallwood are the last of the Phelps line, Sam has three boys, Uncle Bert has two, and Miles is the last Hall heir."

"What about you?"

"Arthur proposed to me, but I turned him down because Lavinia didn't trust him, and Florence told her that he was too old for me. He is only in his forties! That's hypocritical of both of them, particularly Lavinia. She married old Captain Hall and then carried on with Pete Bresnahan. What really sealed it was forcing me to take Miles away from Lucy. I had to go to court to prove that I could provide for the boy without the help of a man and show that my character was unblemished. Since I am the wealthiest woman in the region, the first point was easy. The second impedes any normal courtship. It is better to wait until Miles attains his majority. How about you?"

"Me? I'm free to court any gentleman who works for the company providing they are on the list of approved suitors. I'm not sure whether it is proper that I court them rather than contrarywise but the war and being in cold storage these last four years necessitates dispensing with formalities. Besides being a half-inch short of six-foot and potentially damaging, I come with an assembly of distinguished gentlemen who can complicate any marriage. *The Family* comes first for you; for me, it is the company. It is the same for my sister Ella and Liz Buchanan. Your plight, if anything more than illusion, is consolidating and increasing wealth for a clan on the threshold of extinction."

"You're harsh, Miss Levesque! Why should I continue speaking with you?"

"Arthur skipped off, leaving you holding the bait. He deceived the fiancée left at the alter to unwittingly light his bonfire. Only Emma and her protectors kept the flames from your door. While pointing that perennial nuisance Hiram Grady toward his fate was certainly one of the objectives of Arthur's plot, he demonstrated little regard for the well-being of his ladyloves, or women in general. Though Florence was reticent to reveal her reason for breaking off their engagement, it was obvious to me that she preferred the company of men who genuinely care for her even though they consider her maniacal. You were deceived! Having Florence deliver your letter was cruel; she having Emma be her second was cowardly. You provided him with the match, and he placed it in the hand of the one person he knew would strike it. I seriously doubt whether Arthur imagined the upheaval it would cause. So, where are the avenging angels Clarence and Ruppert? I doubt whether they decided to leave the field before the decisive battle." Where did that come from? Jane was on the verge of tears. I'm nice, well, I was. Phillip looked apprehensive, while Deputy Phales gazed off. Finally, Jane regained her composure.

"Tell Lavinia that I am so sorry. Regardless of what she thinks of me, I must put Miles before her wishes. He calls me mother. Lavinia knows how to reach Clarence and Ruppert." She turned to Deputy Phales. "Do you intend to arrest them?"

"We should but for what? Emmet Hamer wouldn't incriminate himself, and don't expect Emma to say anything against 'her boys.' Chester was on the verge of arresting Florence, but he refuses to say why. Otherwise, we can't charge her. That leaves you. Let me appraise Sheriff Smallwood of the situation. What do you say, Detective Levesque?"

"That's perfectly fine with me. You might mention that he should send a few deputies to assist with the transfer of a 'valuable something.' I like that term. It could be silver ingots or maternal love. I'm sure Miss Deschamps would not mind if you use her telephone?" Jane nodded. After Deputy Phales left the room, Jane and I exchanged nervous smiles. I removed a small sack from my jacket pocket. "Ginger snaps? I baked them last night." Needless to say, she declined. After Deputy Phales returned, Jane timidly asked whether she could call her attorney. Trouble was on the way.

Phillip and I arrived at corporate headquarters at a quarter of five after spending the entire day going through the maze with Jane. Now, I steeled myself for a collective rebuke from Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Hennessy, and Granddaddy James. They allowed Phillip to attend the meeting because they wanted to hear his version of the encounter. During the last two hours, my gentlemen

received telephone calls from Jane's attorney, Prosecutor Kerns, and Sam. All of them wanted to know whether the company intended to file charges against Jane since she agreed to testify against Arthur Mallet. Taken aback, Mr. Buchanan refused to provide them with an immediate answer. He had not read my report. I had yet to write one. Surprisingly, Sheriff Smallwood filed charges against his niece, only later to withdraw them after she agreed to cooperate. He had few reservations about seeking an arrest warrant for Florence but relented after Deputy Phales told him that it was best to obtain her testimony without duress. She could claim ignorance of the plot. That left Lavinia. She endeavored to protect Emma. Since the company was only concerned about the crimes perpetrated against our employee, Mr. Hennessy concurred with Mr. Buchanan's decision not to file charges against her. Even so, both wanted Major Durant present during Sheriff Smallwood's questioning. Only she could bring Clarence and Ruppert out from the shadows. Mr. Buchanan cleared his throat. Alrighty, here it comes:

"Did Jane Deschamps willingly participate in Arthur Mallet's scheme to deceive our company into investigating his feigned disappearance while travelling our line?"

"No. She remain silent for the benefit of Arthur Mallet while Sheriff Smallwood undertook a fruitless investigation. However, Lawson lied to all of us concerning the same."

"Did Miss Deschamps callously disregard Miss Waddell's safety in order to further her ends?"

"No. Sheriff Smallwood and Mr. Hennessy took great pains to withhold Emma's identity in all the dangerous situations she faced. Lavinia, on instructions from the sheriff, fended off all questions from the curious, including those from members of *The Family*. That aside, Lavinia and Jane have not been on speaking terms since Arthur paid the former an unannounced visit in January." I continued by explaining the precarious state of familial ties. Lavinia is the undisputed matriarch; Clarisse Smallwood is her heir apparent; the second in line is Emma Waddell, an heir to her father's vast landholdings providing that she marries an industrious young man who can farm it; Florence is the headstrong bad girl; Lucy, the child bride, is still a child; and Jane is an inconvenience whose birthright is suspect.

"We are not concerned with her defense, Myrna, only whether we should press charges."

"You should not."

"Did you come to this conclusion objectively?"

"Yes."

"Do you have anything to add, Sergeant Quince?" He shook his head. "It's settled. We will not charge her." Granddaddy James and Mr. Hennessy nodded. "So, sergeant, how well did Miss Levesque perform?" He cleared his throat.

"Much better than Deputy Phales. Miss Deschamps has an agile mind and can counter with a strong response. Myrna, I mean Officer Levesque, led her to reveal too much early on, even before she showed us the chest. After she opened it with one of her lockpicks, Miss Deschamps lost her grip. Officer Levesque pressed the offensive until she surrendered. Brilliant! Then she offered her vanquished opponent some ginger snaps. They're wonderful!" Mr. Hennessy smiled and nodded."

"I'm satisfied. Your turn, Roscoe."

"Excellent work, Myrna! Tomorrow, I am having Major Durant attend Sheriff Smallwood's 'chat' with Mrs. Hall. In the meanwhile, Sergeant Quince must accompany you to a meeting with Deputy Phales. He wants to discuss a strategy for snaring the betrayer in the red shirt. It's plausible that she is a link to the outsiders who hired the 'special constables.' Mr. Phales also has a list of the ladies who board at Mrs. Holbrook's house. We are hoping that Mrs. Hall can persuade Clarence Yates and Ruppert Kline to provide us with some fresh intelligence. I assume they have

been busy at something, preferably not creating mayhem. Time to run along. Mrs. Keane is apt to get upset if you're too late for dinner." Upset? It was a quarter of six!

A shifting perspective

Next morning, before our meeting with Deputy Phales, Phillip and I discussed how our interpretation of the evidence changed since Jane revealed her secret. Still, there were many missing pieces to our puzzle and some no longer fit in the places we first thought. That the "pirates," rather "special constables" intended to use the old steam tug for their escape was perplexing. According to Florence's statement concerning her abduction, they had a Hudson touring car. We also discarded our previous assumption that they planned a daytime assault on the Hall house after Emma's notebook identified them as kidnappers masquerading as lawmen. Now we must scrutinize their escape strategy. The men managed to escort Emma through the late afternoon bustle to the tug without attracting any attention. If Chester and the "Peerless boys" had not taken them by surprise, they had time to shove off providing the captain and stoker returned. Neither one of us thought any competent crew would leave their vessel unattended with hot embers in the firebox and steam in her boiler. So, how far could they go. We know the tug started at the layup basin, took on wood at Sics Landing, and should have replenished water at Haynes Town dock. Calculating consumption based upon this distance, the crew could navigate the tug to the North Docks. On the return trip, providing they replenished fuel and water there (Nobody at the port these days deals in cords of wood), Haugh Landing is the limit they could go without taking on fuel, Haynes Town dock for water. Nine miles of strong current separates the North Docks from the latter. It would make more sense if they parked their conspicuous Hudson touring car at Haugh Landing but better at Unity Bluff Landing, a mere two miles upriver from the North Docks. Either way, the kidnappers would have direct access to County Highway. We must ask our friend Agnes Tedder at Unity Bluff Station. Having little to occupy her time, she would have noticed anything unfamiliar in her environs. I also must ask Deputy Phales whether his men noticed cords of wood stacked at Haugh Landing. During the "Battle of Sandyfield Cutoff" they might have used them for cover during their assault from the rear.

I am no longer certain that more than one party wanted Emma. The 'special constables" are outside contractors; the backwoods wasters are hirelings of last resort: a powerful individual is the paymaster for both. Chester and Florence point to the Laine County bootleggers, but to whom do they pay tribute? Clyde Parnell and Max Arless occupy low places in the hierarchy. A steady flow of moonshine continues to supply Port Unity's shady saloons despite their absence. We spent so much time speculating about what Emma knew that we overlooked the obvious reason for knowing the author of the letter: the kidnappers intended to ransom Emma for the bonds. How did they know Arthur left behind half of them? Hiram Grady let it slip.

****

Deputy Phales had good news for us. Myrtle Pruit, the girl who can't keep a secret, boards at Mrs. Holbrook's. Since she worked at the freight office, it would be easy to use her as a conduit for conveying deceptions to the red-shirted betrayer. I don't think Florence would be deceived so easily by one of her fellow boarders dressing up as a boy, but if the lady partnered with a real boy, it would work nicely. Tom thought culling the ladies who had not boarded with Mrs. Holbrook in 1912 was a start. I thought not. We must shake the tree and see what flies out. So, what deception should we plant? We happened to have a nice one in the works: Mr. Skinner was getting the Number 435 ready to pull a special train.

Lavinia agreed to ask Yates and Kline to meet with us when they decide to report back to her. She said "they went behind enemy lines" in late May and have not returned. No matter: they are free-roaming, cagy, act on their own initiative, and pursue their goal tenaciously. She expected to hear from "her boys" eventually. Lavinia identified the contents in the chest. Arthur took out a stack of bonds and left behind the key. The currency belonged to her, her late husband owned the antique revolver, and the pouch of trinkets were Lucy's treasure. She then produced the key. Sheriff Smallwood told her that the chest and its contents were evidence, but he would return all of it eventually.

Mr. Hennessy is in communication with our favorite government contractor, the expert investigator in corporate fraud, counterfeiting, smuggling, and espionage, the magnificent Charles M. Creswell. Yes, ladies, the most enigmatic, manipulative, and dangerous man who ever crossed our path (repeatedly). Mephistopheles in the guise of a Southern gentleman is an accurate description. If trading certain perpetual *ennui* for a brief exciting lifespan of significance sounds appealing, he has the appropriate contract to make it reality. In this instance, Mr. Hennessy suspected Arthur Mallet, Hiram Grady, Michael D. Shaw, and Walter Pierce had incorporated a business to serve as a façade for some type of illegal activity involving foreign bonds. Howard T. Cowan might have participated in this curious enterprise. Also, Sheriff Smallwood and Prosecutor Kerns were curious about the bonds they seized. Were they authentic or counterfeit, valuable or worthless, legally acquired or stolen, and lastly, who owned them? Did they belong to Arthur Mallet, the heirs of Howard Cowan, Cowan Cotton & Fabric, or Jane? Mr. Kerns thought the whole business was a federal matter regardless of whether a crime was committed.

Mr. Buchanan and Liz left on the northbound express this morning to attend a business meeting. He did not leave a detailed itinerary with Mr. Hennessy. Very unusual! I am taking her place in his office for the next week.

Fourth of July

Thursday, Ella, Louis, Phillip, and I attended the Independence Day Celebration. We had a grand time! Afterwards, we brought our fellows home for fried chicken, rice with gravy, buttery peas, and our special custard pie. We set up the whole feast outside like a picnic and played band music on the phonograph. Mrs. Keane was off for the day, so everybody was jolly! We went inside at dusk. Ella and I entertained the boys with some new parlor tricks, and then we played poker. Our fellows went home at around eleven. Afterwards, Ella shared her thoughts on the state of my inquiry after paging through my journal. A recurring linking that we often recognize but never explore thoroughly is Blackwell & Whitaker Wholesale Hardware, specifically "Old Man" Whitaker's unscrupulous boy Lester. Florence suspected he was up to something when she assumed the guise of an office girl in 1912. She might have been right about him all along.

Not a cellar

Florence's detailed description of the route taken by the "special constables" is problematic after they blindfolded her at the turn onto Sics Landing Road. The men put her in a rowboat for an hour-long journey to somewhere. Sics Landing is ideal for launching boats of many sizes but anybody rowing downstream soon encounters strong currents at the narrows leading to the railroad bridge. It is exceedingly difficult to handle a small boat with a gasoline motor in that stretch, much less a rowboat. Many have died there, not only the recent six, but workers unfortunate to fall in while building the several railroad bridges at that location going back to the first in the 1830s. Nobody to my knowledge has ever attempted to swim across. Rowing upstream is easy, but nothing

is there, save magnificent Culver's Lodge and the abandoned Hall Boatyard on our side, neither having any structure with a cellar, and on the Laine County side, timberland, and a scattering of shacks. Below is an excerpt from her statement.

> For six weeks, I played the role of an unremarkable office girl flawlessly. Then, in October, two well-dressed men followed me on my walk home from work. After passing Cowan Cotton & fabric, another two similarly dressed men stepped out from the alley separating Paulson's Store on the west corner of Third and Mulberry and Northside Coal & Ice. The two in front advanced towards me displaying their badges. This was in broad daylight and there were many people on the street! I turned back only to see one of the men to my rear gripping his holstered revolver and his partner preparing to put me in handcuffs. Initially, I thought Dick Browning dreamed up more charges against me; it was only after they rendered me incapable of offering resistance did I realize these men where not Browning's deputies in street clothing. I asked who they were. One produced an official looking warrant for my arrest issued by the court in Laine County. They were "special constables" extraditing me! I could not constrain a laugh. So, Sheriff Dick fabricated evidence to have me charged with crimes in Laine County? After spending a month locked in a cell at the prison farm, I was not worried about spending a few days in Sheriff Jackson's jail while Mr. Smallwood sorted out things. When a shiny black Hudson automobile pulled up to the curb, only then did I start feeling that something was amiss. Nevertheless, when the head constable told me to step in, I complied. What else could I do? Obviously, I was under arrest and none of the bystanders would interfere with officers performing their duty. Once seated, one of the men at my side assured me that the judge usually sets the bail low for those accused of selling moonshine. Moonshine? So, that's what the crafty devil has lined up for me! Slightly relieved it wasn't worse, I slumped back in the opulent seat and braced myself for a bumpy ride on County Highway. At least, this was so much better than enduring the jail wagon. The constables bringing me seemed professional, reserved, and at times, congenial. We passed Haynes Town, the bend in the track where the railroad continues over the Northeast River Bridge, the drive leading up to the homeplace, and then the prison farm. It was then that the constable on my left blindfolded me! Frightened beyond sanity, I lost the power of speech. The men, however, had nothing to say. Once they took a sharp turn to the left, I knew where they were taking me: Sics Landing! When the automobile came to a stop, they wasted little time seating me in a rowboat. Now, I was certain that they intended to drown me like Fred Wheeler! That didn't happen. They rowed for about an hour, I presume downstream because of the train whistles from Northeast Depot. Upon arriving at some point where the water was shallow, the two lifted me onto some gently sloping dry land, and then we walked a winding footpath, each holding one of my arms. I sensed we were ascending a hill; and when we descended a flight of stone steps, there was no doubt in my mind we were on a bluff. I heard the sound of a key turning in a lock, the opening of a door, and then they took me inside a damp cold room.

Alrighty, let's think about this cellar. Florence was on an eight-foot chain and couldn't reach either end of its length, so, larger than sixteen feet. Narrow? In the perpetual darkness, she wouldn't know that unless she could touch both walls, eight feet or less. I'd say six, because Florence described a fitting for plumbing or steam that can only be a pipe flange. It is for bolting two pieces of pipe together. It's a service passageway for pipe. We have plenty like it in Unity Station. I want to explore them!

The villains took Florence uphill on a pathway leading from the river and then down a flight of steps. That sounds like the outside entrance to our basement, or it could be steps on the north side of the terminal connecting Hayne Street (higher) to the passenger yard (lower) but it is ground level in both places. Likewise, if you enter the bottom floor of the courthouse, you must take the steps descending below street level; you enter the same floor in the rear from the street. The topography determines the ground level where you enter. Florence assumed they held her in a cellar. It might be the bottom floor of a building located on a slope. Commerce Street ascends from river street to Fifth Avenue. Every building in that part of downtown is on a slope, even as far north as Corporate Headquarters, so we have the same arrangement. Finally, the "depression" cut into the floor is for draining off condensation and spill. Water flows down, so there's the proof it is above the level of the river, certainly built into a slope. The whole sounds more like part of a factory than a dwelling. There's one problem: if you find it, proving that it is the place where the *faux* constables imprisoned Florence is difficult. I must share my analysis with Deputy Wilkes. He knows the area.

An examination of the landings

Saturday, Mr. Hennessy allowed me to leave the safety of the terminal briefly for a boat excursion on the Northeast River with deputies Tom Phales and Chester Wilkes. Sergeant Quince accompanied me. All of us dressed inconspicuously, I in my drab charcoal dress, boots, and "floppy" hat. The object of our adventure was examining all the landings where the Laine County bootleggers could unload their wares. Both gentlemen thought Florence was correct about the moonshine coming into our county by boat. We came ashore several times to look for evidence of motorized vehicles using the old wagon paths to reach the landings. There were recent tire tracks at Haugh Landing, near the site of the Battle of Sandyfield Cutoff. At the docks of the old ice factory, a mile below the cutoff, we discovered evidence that a large boat had recently tied off. Between these places, there were numerous streams feeding into both sides of the river navigable by johnboats. Deputy Phales remarked that the citizens of Northeast Township know where all these streams begin, along with all their twists and bends. Well, the railroad crosses all of them. In addition to the surveys in the company archives, the county has soil maps and those prepared for highway work. These boys really need me!

Thus far, we examined the landings looking for ruts from automobiles. If the steamboat loaded the moonshine onto a dozen small boats on its way downriver the crates could be transfer to automobiles at a number of places. Deputy Wilkes noted that some logging roads intersect the array of streams emptying into the river. Even so, when the "captain" broke the shipment down, it was too difficult to intercept all of it enroute to many points in the county. No doubt, somebody maintained a reserve stockpiled in their barn to offset the inventory lost to lawmen. During the war, the supply of bootleg liquor never slacked despite the regular raids carried out by the deputies. Furthermore, the liquor they captured never amounted to more than a two-day supply for each shady saloon. Like any well-managed business, the bootleggers plan for a certain percentage of lost inventory.

I envisioned the organization of the bootleg liquor enterprise as an hourglass: many manufacturers of the product contributed to a shipment, and many participated in its distribution. Its narrowest point was transportation in bulk on the river. Even so, we could not dismiss the possibility that the shipment transported over the roads was part of the procedure. Deputy Phales wanted to know what I thought were the limitations to this arrangement. "How do these moonshiners keep up deliveries despite all the loose-tongue talk from their customers and our

raids?" Well, I laughed! Compare the similarities and differences of freight transport by rail and inland navigation.

The railroad neither produces nor sells the goods it carries. We receive freight at our warehouses, loaded onto cars, and dispatched them to depots on the line. There, our men make up trains bound to separate locations from the cars. It is a very precise system requiring intensive organization. On the river, many vessels are transporting a variety of commodities, mostly those which are bulky and not needed immediately. There are fewer clients and there are specific locations for breaking bulk. Sometimes, the entire shipment is destined for one location. Forest products such as lumber, a major commodity from Laine County, proceeds down the Northeast River on barges, particularly from those mills located in those areas not near the spur from Spring Garden to Wayne City. Small vessels bring sundry finished goods upriver to the old communities that grew up in the age of inland navigation. Once well-situated at landings, they are now inconveniently located to take advantage of the railroad and the system of roads is still primitive. This sparsely populated area, mostly woodlands and swamps, is favorable for river commerce. If organized, somebody acts as agent and manager of merchandise, paying for quantities produced by many, storing it in various locations, and then arranging for its shipment. A transportation agent organizes the loose coalition of independent owners of vessels, paying each a set amount for the service. The producers and retailers of the product are variable. The bootleggers mimic the organization of legitimate business. I envision it thusly: there are three divisions, each independent, sharing only necessary particulars. In this way, “loose-tongue talk” does not endanger the entire enterprise. By paying the unscrupulous owners of vessels plying the river on legitimate business, the shipment continues to a landing where the small boats receive it.

It's worth noting that Emma and Florence did not know what was in the crates unloaded at the old boatyard dock. For all we know, it could have been canned goods or fruit. There are residents of the northern section of the county living on the banks of the river and alongside the many creeks emptying into it who would welcome such a service. Several boats deliver manufactured goods upriver and bringing back produce and forest products, including Whitaker’s navigation company. Lester Whitaker owns one steamboat but is the agent for several independent operators. It is not farfetched to imagine including a couple of cases or three of moonshine along with boxes of cucumbers on the downriver leg.

Deputy Phales wondered how the money flowed upward in my three-part organization. It is a given that everybody involved must make a profit. Since the retailer (or bartender) can only charge so much for the product, the percentages for each participant progressing backward to the producer (or distiller) is small.

This arrangement, however, has limits: increased demand requires more organization of these divisions, including more producers. The volume of spirits distilled must be enormous to justify the cost. If for example each division of this venture required ten percent above expenses that would mean a thirty percent markup before the saloon tacked on their profit. By necessity, scarcity must drive demand to support the higher cost. Moonshiners and smugglers will achieve absolute advantage in the liquor marketplace when the Eighteenth Amendment goes into effect. The prospect of this outcome has occupied my mind occasionally since the enactment of wartime restrictions. If Florence was correct in her suspicions, the system was in place in 1912 or earlier; but before wartime restrictions, the market for illegal distilled spirits was modest.

Deputy Wilkes considered the current moonshine trade a holdover from Sheriff Browning’s corrupt administration, an annoyance which through proper policing and integrity in local government was constrainable. I disagree.

Corruption exists alongside opportunity: where one can make a profit there are some in office who are willing to betray the public trust to share in it. Political parties exist to promote the prosperity of one group of constituents or another. Lawbreakers occasionally find comfortable niches on the edges of this arrangement providing they do not become an irritation to the benefactors of the party. The end to the legal manufacturing and sale of alcoholic drink presents opportunities to smugglers and bootleggers to the degree where they can move from their niches to the center. I can easily imagine otherwise law-abiding citizens participating in this new economy on some level, whether consuming or vending (or officeholding).

The deputies limited experience with the bootleg liquor market comes from drunks picked up on weekends and the arrested proprietors of the "shady saloons." To date, most of the distilled spirits they confiscated came from secret stockpiles of legitimate liquor manufactured sometimes in the past; only a small portion was moonshine. I can anticipate that those involved in the trade of the latter are preparing for the day when their product will dominate the market.

****

As we continued upriver towards the "Narrows" the motor of our small boat labored to overcome the current. Obviously, this section promised a harrowing ordeal for anybody foolish enough to negotiate the flow in a rowboat from the opposite direction. If Florence's abductors put her in the boat at Sics Landing, they didn't take her downriver. We agreed to continue our excursion beyond this place because Chester examined it several times since the abduction of Clayton and Groves. Two miles further upriver we came to the abandoned Hall Boatyard. The wharves stretch into a deep-water lagoon scoured into the bluff by the current. The topography of the shore rises gradually about twelve feet to the cluster of brick workshops. Unfinished vessels of assorted sizes and piles of sundry debris clutter the intervening yard. Downriver of the wharves is the drydock cut in the bluff. Accessed by a winding pathway ascending it, the brick pumphouse for draining the drydock is the only visible structure above from the riverside. The gates are open, so the river flooded the enclosure. Only about a dozen feet of the stone block walls rise above the waterline. The path to the pumphouse caught my attention. This could be the same Florence described in her statement. Thus far, nothing on our journey approximated it. We could not go ashore to make a closer examination because the attorney for the Hall Shipyard stipulated in the agreement that an employee of that company must be present to guide us. Even so, from our boat, I took many photographs with my box camera of these interesting features. It was the first time I had seen this site other than on a map.

****

Mr. Hennessy and Sheriff Smallwood decided to follow through with my plan to lure the turncoats and kidnappers out into the open. Just as I proposed, Mr. Skinner will use the opportunity to take Number 435 out for a run. It takes a while to get it ready so the 'ears afoot' have ample time to report the unusual activity to their chief. Ella is the decoy. Not only is she a close match for five-foot-eight blue eyed Emma, but she is also well-schooled in the skills necessary to thwart kidnappers.

Impressive deception

Liz returned yesterday afternoon. After speaking with her, we decided to tell Mr. Hennessy what she discovered on her "holiday." Again, he threw us for a loop!

"Good afternoon, ladies. Please take a seat. I received a communication from Mr. Creswell which is most disconcerting." He produced an old newspaper clipping from an envelope. Above the article was a studio portrait of a man who we didn't know. "This is Walter Pierce. Remember

him? He was the attorney who delivered the bonds to Miss Deschamps. In this article dated February 21, 1899, his title is company attorney for Howard Cowan & Son Cotton." Liz interjected.

"Yes, I have it here. In 1901, Michael D. Shaw quit Cowan & Son Cotton to form a partnership with Arthur Mallet and Hiram Grady in Charleston. Pierce resigned his position with Howard Cowan & Son to join Mallet & Grady Cotton Brokers. By 1904, he was the only remaining member of the original partnership working in Charleston. Their business address was a house rented to Arthur Mallet, and the local merchants recognize Walter Pierce who went by that name and his arrogant hot-tempered partner Grady, but none remember Shaw, including the neighbors. However, Shaw's name appeared on the legal documents establishing the partnership. Their brokerage did not do any business. Instead, they spent their days pestering merchants, haunting the wharves, and looking at vacant commercial buildings under the pretext of being potential renters. In 1904, Howard T. Cowan, president of Cowan & Son Cotton died; Mallet & Grady was a brokerage financed by him. It never accomplished anything because he died. Alfred Cowan took his place and Pierce changed the corporate name to 'The Charleston Office of Cowan Cotton & Fabric,' formerly Mallet & Grady."

"Have you been carrying on an investigation on your own?"

"Yes and no; I call it research. Some of it we know: Michael Dennis Shaw is the younger Michael Shaw who worked for Howard Cowan & Son Cotton, Rhodes Cotton Gin & Seed Oil, and Consolidated Cotton. Though his name appears on the official documents incorporating Mallet & Grady, I found no evidence suggesting he was an active partner in the business. Michael William Shaw, Sr. worked for Consolidated Cotton his entire career. Arthur Mallet worked continuously for Howard Cowan & Son, and later, Cowan Cotton & Fabric, never working for Rhodes Cotton Gin & Seed Oil or Consolidated Cotton."

"How did you discover all this?" Ha-ha-ha! Liz and her daddy couldn't leave it alone! Those two when on a little holiday. Covering three states, they pestered public officials, newspaper editors, corporate managers, and relatives of the deceased Michael Shaw, eventually assembling a nice pile of public documents and statements. No fair: they didn't take me along! Did they find anything current about the younger Shaw? No. He left the employment of Consolidated Cotton in 1916. That's it! What about Grady? Nothing! "Very well, here is more from Mr. Creswell: after 1904, Walter Pierce still managed the offices of Cowan Cotton & Fabric in Charleston, but it was merely a rented residence that he vacated in the fall of 1916; Alfred Cowan claims the bonds we recovered belong to him but he must provide proof beyond his father's calling card glued inside the lid of the chest; Michael D. Shaw rents an office in Wayne City near the Consolidated Cotton mill though the building manager said he hasn't used it since last fall; the deceased "special constables,' or 'pirates,' as the *Messenger* calls them, were professional criminals, once members of the now disbanded Campbell Gang; and Hiram Grady was never employed by Howard Cowan & Son, even though his photograph appears in their booklet. Mr. Creswell found Grady's role in Howard Cowan's game baffling. Why choose a man like that to do anything, much less a business partner, save the capital he brought to the venture. He had that. Doled out quarterly in generous portions by an attorney. So, Mr. Yates intelligence was accurate on that point. Messy-messy-messy, ladies! Myrna, tell me why we should be concerned?"

"Whether Mallet & Grady was a façade for Howard Cowan's dubious financial dealings or not is irrelevant to the case that Mr. Buchanan wants to bring against Arthur Mallet and associates. This might also include Alfred Cowan, Gilbert Lawson, and others if there is irrefutable evidence connecting them to the conspiracy to compel the company into investigating the disappearance of

Arthur Mallet while traveling on its railroad. That's the whole of it. Though the proximate consequences of their deceptions including, but not limited to, the multiple attempts to abduct Miss Waddell, the damage to company property caused by the explosion of the steam tug, and the endangerment of our employees, involves different parties, counting Hiram Grady, who did not participate in the Arthur Mallet disappearance ruse. Nevertheless, the proximate consequences, whether by design or unintended, offer the possibility of a successful civil case brought against the Mallet conspirators. How does that sound? I turn twenty-four in September so that means Mr. Buchanan no longer speaks on my behalf at the stockholders' meetings. I'm practicing the art of dispassionate rhetoric so the directors might peg me as pragmatic and analytical but nice." Mr. Hennessy rolled his eyes. "Our concern about the possibility that Mr. Mallet used our company to facilitate his deception has merit, but we must await further findings from Mr. Creswell's investigation."

"What about you, Miss Buchanan?"

"I am inclined to agree with Myrna. Even so, nobody has yet to uncover evidence that Mr. Mallet had cause to deliberately "get lost" other than self-preservation. That is a plausible defense regardless of his previous wrongdoings. Aside, the business practices of Cowan Cotton & Fabric appear risky and unethical."

Concerning Cowan Cotton & Fabric, the father and daughter sleuths discovered a disconcerting method for the company's rapid growth. Howard Cowan owned a cotton brokerage: they bought ginned cotton from a number of warehouses and sold it to textile manufacturers. After his death, his son Alfred acquired ginning operations and warehouses to expand business. Eventually, the company bought several small regional mills to make fabric. The company carried heavy bond debt to finance its growth. To service its obligations and acquire new holdings, some of these older plants did not receive necessary improvements despite the demand for increased production. Once run into the ground, Cowan pillaged the useful equipment, auctioned the rest, and sold the real estate, leaving the workers to find other employment. That is what happened to the cotton works at Port Unity.

The boatyard

Sunday, Deputy Wilkes, and Major Durant showed up unannounced after breakfast. Accompanying them was Mr. Evenson from the Hall Shipyard. Sheriff Smallwood pressed Lavinia to allow us to search the boatyard after Deputy Wilkes went out to Northeast Township on Saturday. On showing his magazine picture of a Hudson *Model 33 Torpedo* to the men gathered at the general store near Haynes Town, several told him that hunters (most of them hunt) frequently saw one like it parked on the boatyard grounds. After fetching my bag and riding hat, I joined them.

Turning onto the untended drive leading to the boatyard, now barely visible threw a dense blind of young pines, we stopped to examine the roadway. Since it rained often starting in April, we expected to find deep tire tracks. We did, for several vehicles. The road also had some impressive mudholes! Out of an abundance of caution, Deputy Wilkes went around them. Once parked in the yard behind the open gate, we began our search with the office. Secured by a padlock, we did not expect to find anything. Instead, we discovered two new kerosene lanterns atop a battered desk. Deputy Wilkes turned to Mr. Evenson.

"Has anybody been out here lately?"

"No, sir. The last employee who signed for the keys was Mr. Parnell. That was in 1917." Deputy Wilkes put on his driving gloves to examine one of the lanterns. After unscrewing the cap and taking a whiff, he turned back to the locksmith.

"Kerosene goes bad after sitting around for more than a year. You can tell by the smell; and look, the whole surface of the desk is dusty, even under the bottom of the lanterns."

"Sir, they're not our lanterns. So, how did they get here. Door padlocked, our men nailed shut all the windows, no holes in the floor: that means somebody used a key. Look down there: shoe prints in the dust leading from the door and we left these chairs stacked in the storeroom out back." After conducting a thorough search of the office, we found nothing that Mr. Evenson deemed unusual, so Deputy Wilkes took the lanterns back to his automobile and prepared a receipt for them. Our examination of the six padlocked brick buildings constituting the workshops was a tedious affair. On closing down the boatyard, Elias Hall had all the machinery removed to the shipyard save a small stationary engine used to power a winch for launching small vessels. The central workshop was massive, well over twenty feet in height not counting its lantern roof. Its bricked-up windows made it seem cavernous. Except for a long oak workbench, the interior was bare. An engine house abutting the workshop powered the machinery. We found sundry mechanical parts strewn willy-nilly on the floor. The doors on both buildings were ironclad. I could continue with a description of the other buildings, but they had no clues to offer: no shoe prints, no signs of recent entry. We went down to the docks. There we found numerous wooden boats in various stages of construction in the yard. Chief among them was a flatboat buttressed by a cradle of timbers. Workers abandoned it in the last stages of construction. Beyond here, the elevation slopes downward to the elaborate wharves.

The central wharf showed evidence of recent use, particularly fresh abrasions, and gouges in the pilings where vessels tied off. The visitors littered the deck with empty produce crates, whiskey bottles, and tin cans. Deputy Wilkes remarked that it was common knowledge that commercial boats belonging to some operators such as the Northeast River Navigation Company tie-off here before continuing to Port Unity. The wharf at Haynes Town charges a fee for docking overnight.

Downriver of the wharves, the winding footpath starts at the water's edge. I was excited! Upon reaching the top of the bluff we found the pumphouse for the drydock. Once unlocked, it proved to be bare of machinery but the stumps of large pipes coming up through the floor had connecting flanges! Continuing on the footpath we came to the drydock. It was quite impressive. Mr. Evenson explained what we were seeing.

"In the days when the large river boats made regular trips, the company repaired them here. The depth of the water at this spot is sixteen feet. We are about that height from the waterline, so it was quite a drop when pumped dry. That's why Captain Hall had this wrought iron fence put around it. There used to be iron staircases going down both sides at the rear and a crane for bringing down what the workers needed. The ramp rising up through the arch in the back wall ended at an elevator platform which descended to the bottom. One stationary engine turned the wheel for both hoisting the ramp's cart and turning the shaft running out to the gearbox of the elevator. The company sold all of it for scrap including all the pipes. See those flanges sticking out of the wall every ten feet above the highwater line? An elbow and twenty feet of iron pipe going down to the drains below the bottom attached to them. Let me show you something."

On the upriver side of the drydock was a flight of stone steps leading down to an ironclad door. It didn't have a padlock. Instead, an old mortice lock which opens with a large brass key secured it. Immediately, I retrieved the pistol from my bag.

"Hold on, gentlemen. This is where the 'special constables' held Florence Phelps. There's no telling what's behind that door. Deputy Wilkes and Major Durant unholstered their sidearms. "We can't all go in. Somebody needs to stand guard." The Major took the position at the top of the steps and Deputy Wilkes went in first after the locksmith opened the door. "What do you see?"

"Nothing!"

"Is it empty?"

"I can't see anything! We need a light. Damnation! Just ran into one of those things poking out of the wall." He carefully felt his way back into the light at the entrance. "Alright, none of us has a light. Ironically, we found two kerosene lanterns but they're evidence." I removed the fancy cigar lighter Frank gave me from my bag. "What's that?" I struck it. "Fine, let's take a peek before that think burns up. If it goes, we'll crawl out." We went in about thirty feet and that was enough. I was right! The passageway was six feet wide by eight feet tall with an arched ceiling and a floor of stone slabs into which the mason carved a channel for draining off water. The second flanged pipe had a length of sturdy chain padlocked to it with another padlock on the end, both old style three-tumbler types in cast bronze cases. The chain left stretched out on the floor was about eight feet long. We returned outside quickly after my flame started to flicker. Once Mr. Evenson secured the door, we returned to Deputy Wilkes' automobile, and then proceeded to Haynes Town Station to telephoned Sheriff Smallwood and Mr. Hennessy. After seven years of dismissing Florence's statement as a narcotic-tainted misapprehension, we found the probable place where the "special constables" held Florence. Though we had yet to discover evidence connecting the site to others they abducted, the lantern bore signs of recent use that approximated the reported recent occasions when hunters saw the Hudson. If so, the problem of an unaccounted-for set of keys did not end with the ice factory. There is another explanation: the perpetrators wiped clean the kerosene lanterns, padlocks, and so forth. Indeed, the "special constables" were professionals. In that case, it is not farfetched to imagine that one of their number is skilled in opening locks without a key. I can. What doesn't fit with this hypothesis is the padlocks on the chain that tethered Florence. They are the same make as those used to secure the buildings in 1909 yet none of the latter are missing.

Sheriff Smallwood and several deputies returned to the pipe passageway with lights and made a thorough search. In a section of the drainage channel cut into the stone floor they found a dainty antique gold necklace. It belongs to Florence! She was happy to get it back since her mother gave it to her on her twelfth birthday. So, the captors rowed upstream from Sics Landing to the boatyard, they took her by the foot path to the drydock, and then locked her in the passageway.

Clarence and Ruppert

Saturday afternoon, I planned to take a stroll to get out from underfoot. Uh-huh, Mrs. Keane was running me out! Phillip is working at the station, so paying him a surprise visit was in order. Just as I was ready to slip out the back door, she came up behind me.

"Myrna! There are two nice gentlemen here to see you. Here are their calling cards. They're your size and have a beautiful automobile!" She thinks that if I get sweet on a fellow shorter than me, I might unintentionally damage him.

"Splendid! Tell them I'll be out in a moment. I can't wait to see their Peerless!" So, they decided to visit me. That's fine."

"Mr. Yates and Mr. Kline, what a wonderful surprise! I've heard so much about you. I'm Myrna Levesque." They tipped their hats. "May I have a peek at your engine?" Clarence smiled.

"I take it that you are fond of automobiles?"

"Anything mechanical is for me." He opened the hood. "Oh-my!"

"*Model 60-Six* seven-passenger touring, 1914, six cylinders, two valves per cylinder, sliding gear transmission, and it has a gorgeous clock: it drives sweet!"

"1914? I thought you were driving around in the railroad district in 1912?"

"We were! That was Ruppert's 1909 *Model 25*. Keep current with the latest motors and you'll never fall behind. Moreover, your roads are a bit rough, and we always need more horsepower. Want to take a ride?"

"I sure do! Are you taking me to your hideout?"

"We're encamped at Florence's place."

"Oh, that's no fun! I was expecting something more mysterious. No, I wasn't – ha-ha-ha! Let's go!" What a ride! Ruppert tore along on County Highway full throttle after we left the Northside but pulled back on the approach to Haynes Town.

"So. Mr. Yates, why did you pick me as your liaison?"

"Lavinia said you are Emma's friend, and Sam gave us all these newspaper clippings. I mean, it some impressive stuff: saving a fellow officer from gunfire, digging out a worker buried under coal, running headlong in the dark towards an approaching freight train to place torpedoes on the tracks, outwitting a dangerous woman criminal who handcuffed you to something inside a locomotive, discovering an underground tomb, designing some kind of cylinder valves, and you bake cookies."

"I sure do! Would you like to try one of my special butter cookies with black walnut pieces? The shell on those tasty nuts is so hard you must bust them with a hammer so all you get is pieces. They're good in pancakes, too. Have the whole bag. I have plenty."

"How's the pooch?"

"I'm still waiting for him. Alrighty, gentlemen, pull under a nice shade tree and let's get down to business. Just to let you know, Emma thought well of you two despite starting off on the wrong foot. I'm not a lady who makes it a habit of going for drives with handsome gentlemen who just happen by so let's say we have a common purpose and mutual trust. Am I correct?"

"Yes, ma'am. We're your guardian angels."

"Uh-huh, it works both ways. Call me Myrna. Now, tell me what I need to know."

"We went behind enemy lines. Hiram Grady hired Clyde Parnell to grab Mallet before he skipped off with their loot in December, but his man couldn't get around Lawson. That was a Laine County moonshiner named Philo 'Smoky' Grimes, the dirty jobs man for the Grimes Clan. Great name there for a heavy: Smoky. He trailed Mallet home to Cowan. Something was not right there, so he stayed in town through Christmas. Mallet left for Port Unity after New Years; Grimes followed. Lawson was still there so he stayed back. After sending a telegram, Arthur paid a visit to Lavinia with Lawson following, and then headed back to the station. Our girl came out, so Grimes followed her to Jane's place. After reporting back to Parnell, they decided to take Jane. She might know what Mallet was pulling. 'Old Man' Willard Grimes said forget it. Kidnapping Sheriff Smallwood's niece was too risky, especially since Grady couldn't prove she knew anything. Parnell thought kidnapping Jane's boy was better. She'd pay anything to get him back. Smoky told him to stick with the liquor trade. After 'Old Man' Willard told Grady to take his business elsewhere, his majesty bribed a fellow on Lavinia's household staff to spy for him. That's when he learned that she was keeping a "treasure chest" for Arthur. About this time, Annie Cowan brought her letters to the newspaper. Thinking Lavinia would sell out Arthur to save Emma, Grady hired a drifter looking for work who spent time in prison for armed robbery."

"We know how that went. How did Grady get the box?"

"He had his spy take it. Why didn't the idiot think of that earlier? Arthur cleaned it out. Grady went back to Parnell. Figuring Jane and Emma knew where Arthur was hiding, hothead wanted both to 'receive a visit.' Grady was on the outs with the Grimes Clan, so Parnell said he'd pass it along to his Port Unity partners. They were more interested in Emma, and so were the proprietors of the Northside moonshine establishments. She was Sheriff Smallwood's top snoop, the lady with the golden ears. If she warned Arthur about Grady coming to town, what else did she know? Well, nothing. They wanted professionals to take our girl. You know how that turned out, too. What you don't know is Parnell sent the tug downriver with a load of moonshine for Old Haynes Plantation Landing. His middleman client, probably local outsider boss Ted Dillard, also wanted it at Whitaker's dock waiting to take the 'special constables' and Emma to their getaway car at Unity Bluff Landing later in the day. Fine and dandy, except Parnell's pal Arless decided to take the shipment and unloaded at Whitakers wharf after dark, selling cut-rate to the same outsiders. He had no idea that their bosses provided the services of the 'special constables.' After pirating the tug, Arless' crew took it to the North Docks and abandoned it at Whitaker's dock, oblivious of the plot they spoiled."

"Who blew it up?"

"Nobody is talking about that. We suspect Lester Whitaker wanted to cut out the competition. Smoky sent some of his men out to finish with Emma but Chester did an outstanding job of fixing that problem. Well, we did our part behind the scenes and Cato's fellows were a tremendous help. Smoky is out; Parnell is out, and Arless is in jail. Who knows what happened to Grady, but I wager that he isn't coming back. The big city bosses are upset about losing their men so 'Old Man' Willard stepped down and let organize crime manage his business. Right now, they are more concerned about satisfying the demand in the big city markets. Port Unity since the end of the war is small time. Boss Griggs was the victim of a coupe within his own house. Going back aways, it was Griggs who first hired those 'special constables' to make his problems disappear. That's when they were at their best. A real hardnose named Wentworth was their boss. He went bye-bye and new management let things slide. Now, local bosses hire local. Joe's boys didn't let go of the shop. I don't know about his successor, but he has Parnell's share wrapped up. They're out of politics and fully in with the liquor trade. Big trouble! The Laine County boys fall in with what they know. However, the new Griggs Gang is just getting on their feet."

"So, Arthur Mallet's legendary treasure doesn't figure into it. Booze is everything."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. Somebody big on the outside wants Mallet's goods and is willing to pay top dollar to any outfit who delivers. The Grimes Clan is still willing to lose a few more of their boys trying. They've been making overtures to the Northside 'businessmen' for some help. Those jokers need some help in return. New management all-around wants three troublemakers out of the way: Sheriff Smallwood, Cato Houghton, and you."

"Me?"

"Yes, but they'll hold you for ransom first. Don't worry, we'll protect you."

"I'm sure. When should I expect a visit?"

"Be on the lookout for a baggy-pants character in a red shirt. It's really a girl. She'll lead them to you."

"Yes, I know."

"You're good!"

"Do you know a two-faced informant in this new enterprise?"

"A few. Boss Griggs' payroll gave us lots of names, some willing to work both sides if it pays."

"Tell them that Sheriff Smallwood and I discovered Arthur Mallet's secret cache of British bearer bonds, and we will be transporting them by special train to an undisclosed point on the line. There, government agents will assume custody of the bonds. The total par value of the bonds is one and a half million pounds sterling." Ha-ha-ha!

"So, what are they really worth?"

"I have no idea."

"Don't leave us out. This road is perfect for setting up an ambush so let us pace you full speed and cover your flank. With our still busters, we can fend off the best of them."

"What's a still buster?"

"It's a rifle with a barrel as long as a goose gun and the diameter of a quarter. It shoots a slug that punches through metal, turning an automobile engine into junk easily!"

"In that case, you must offer your services to Charles Creswell, He's the gentleman representing the government's interest in this matter. No doubt, he'll want to hire you. I'll leave a message with Lavinia when he arrives."

We had a pleasant drive back to town. Mrs. Keane approved of my new gentlemen friends. "They're such nice boys." Good enough! I wasn't manhandled, tied up, or threatened with ending up buried alive.

There remains so many loose ends concerning Mallet's devious dealings that it is difficult to determine where to begin. It can wait. Presently, we must warn Cato and Sheriff Bert of the threat and then prepare for the assault. Mr. Hennessy, the military scholar, proved himself a valiant warrior in the defense of Charles Creswell's special train. It seems the appropriate time for the latter to return the favor. Besides that, I have to excellent potential recruits for his organization.

The Trap

Neither Sheriff Smallwood nor Mr. Hennessy were pleased that I took it upon myself to make plans for them. I defended my position by noting that signing myself into protective custody for a month and then skulking off to parts unknown would not be to their advantage. Besides that, the sheriff and Cato Houghton were also in peril. Mr. Hennessy decided to go ahead with my ruse and Sheriff Smallwood reluctantly agreed. Ella insisted upon remaining a part of it, so Mr. Hennessy allowed her to join Chester's "shoot-em-up" riflemen – Goodness!

****

A yard engine shunted the baggage and first-class cars to the turnout at Unity Bluff Station at half-past ten. Mr. Deschamps gave us an open road to Northeast Depot if we left at eleven. Number 435 had a head of steam and was waiting on a turnout above the upper yards. Mr. Cooke and Mr. McKee volunteered to make the run despite the dangers and Captain Johnston road along in the cab because of it. Sheriff Smallwood's deputies took their positions in the woods along the dirt road leading from River Road to Unity Bluff and Chester's men took positions on the heights above the cut of the great arc. Sheriff Smallwood, Major Durant, and I were in the passenger car; preferring to repeat his defensive strategy from our previous engagement, Mr. Creswell had Clarence and Ruppert armed with their "still-busters" joining the government riflemen in the baggage car. Phillip was in command of the station patrol under orders to detain any baggy-pants adolescent wearing a red shirt. At a quarter of eleven, Mr. Cooke backed Number 435 through the arc for the coupling. Mr. Creswell's riflemen conspicuously assumed their positions around the train. Thereafter, Deputy Phales arrived with an armed escort. He placed the lockbox inside the baggage car, and Mr. Hennessy padlocked it. The end doors of the car locked from the inside so Clarence, Ruppert, and the riflemen could step out on the platforms to join in the defense. Assisting

us in the passenger car was Major Durant, Sergeant Bates, and guess. That's right, ladies, the magnificent Charles M. Creswell was riding along to ensure safe transfer of the bonds. Yes, and more of his government men were at Northeast Depot ready to receive the lockbox. Nobody was happier than Sheriff Smallwood to hand off those bonds. At eleven o'clock, the semaphore gave us proceed-clear. A quarter mile into the arc we encountered a sedan parked across the tracks. Several armed men out front set fire to fuel oil on the crossties in an attempt to signal us to stop. After we failed to slow, their friends behind the automobile commenced firing at the locomotive with rifles. Mr. Cooke gave her steam and rammed through, sending the wreckage flying. After we passed, Chester's men fired a volley. That was it! What's next?

Coming out of the arc we entered the double track corridor at forty-six miles per hour. The next spot they could hit us was where County Highway ran alongside the tracks, so Mr. Cooke increased our speed. All clear! Where were they? We heard rifle shots and then a black sedan careened onto County Highway from Haugh Landing full speed, its occupants spraying gunfire at our car. We gave them a volley when they came alongside. Our pursuers followed behind on the roadway. Suddenly, they raced ahead toward the locomotive, so we aimed at their tires as they passed. Ka-boom, ka-boom: the automobile disintegrated in fiery scrap before our eyes. Surprise! Clarence and Ruppert hit the mark with their still-busters. During our exchange with those rascals, a bullet grazed my upper arm. I was mad!

We crossed the trestle at Buzzard Creek and then tore through Haynes Town Station like a hurricane. Alrighty, now the curve to the bridge. We couldn't take it that fast. Their last chance was stopping us on the approach to the bridge. There they were! Having pulled up a rail, the rascals took cover behind their automobile. Ha-ha-ha! They sabotaged the wrong track! As we sped by all of us from Captain Johnston to Mr. Hennessy peppered their sedan with bullets. Two miles to Northeast Depot! Hurrah! We came to a stop eighteen minutes before the southbound trains. The rifle-toting government men were waiting on the platform. Charles Creswell signed the papers for the transfer, and then retired to his well-guarded private car spotted on a turnout to await the continuation of his journey with the Number 435. That would not happen until after the overnight express passed. Mr. Hennessy was taking me back to Port Unity along with Deputy Phales, Clarence, and Rupert. We were riding in our bullet riddled car coupled to a freight train after they were inspected. Major Durant, Captain Johnston, and Sergeant Bates were continuing on to Orchard with Mr. Creswell. In the meanwhile, Mr. Cooke and Mr. Hennessy informed the stationmaster of the damaged rail, so he ordered out a crew to close off that section of track for the repairs after Deputy Phales, Major Durant, and several men with stretchers cross the bridge on foot to assess our handywork: one dead, three seriously wounded. Traffic proceeded on the other track from Northeast to Haynes Town until two o'clock. The time had come the slip into the lavatory to tend to my arm. The stationmaster gave me a bottle of carbolic acid to disinfect my "cut" and several gauze bandage rolls. Drats!

We could not return to Unity Terminal until four o'clock. I was dumbstruck by the horrific carnage we wrought in the minutes we ran the gauntlet: eight dead, six survivors. All of it originated in my head. The upper yards patrol captured the red-shirted betrayer. Her name was Rose Saunders, longtime boarder at Mrs. Holbrook's, who like Florence, worked as an office girl in the accounting department of Whitaker & Blackwell. Deputy Phales registered her in the courthouse jail and then immediately sent her to the cells for special prisoners at the county farm out of concern for her safety. Myrtle Pruit played her role as loose tongue in this massacre so well that Mr. Hennessy recommended her for a commendation.

After returning to the terminal, my "guardian angels" said they look forward to inviting me along on their next drive in the country and then they set off in their Peerless to avoid the hubbub. I went to the station infirmary to get my wound properly dressed, so Phillip took me home late. Mrs. Keane was not pleased.

"Myrna, where's your granddaddy?"

"Speaking with the newspaper reporter."

"Your messy! What did you do to your jacket?"

"It's nothing. The doctor at the infirmary patched me up."

"Roughhousing again! Go clean up and put on your dinner dress before your granddaddy comes home. Is Mr. Quince staying for dinner?"

"Yes."

"Hurry up then. Don't keep him waiting. Fix that hair!" She pointed her finger at Phillip. "You, wait in the parlor! Stay out from underfoot until you hear the dinner bell, tinkle-tinkle-tinkle. Shoo!" Granddaddy James and Ella came home at about the same time. Both visited the infirmary upon learning about my injury. The doctor told them it wasn't a cut. "A bullet grazed her arm. It is not deep, extends for about an inch, and should heal quickly." He expected the scar would fade in time. Who cares? I have more to worry about than a scar on my arm. Will they, whoever they are, try again? Mr. Hennessy thinks not. Losing three automobiles and eight men for nothing is failure. "What idiot thought up such a foolish plot?" Not so, only ill-timed, and the rascals had no expectations of encountering an overwhelming defense. It's my guess that the bosses are now more concerned about Miss Saunders and the survivors than Sheriff Smallwood, Cato Houghton, and me. If their true objective was stealing the bonds, we amply proved their ineptitude. Even so, the outcome came down to choosing the wrong track to sabotage. Had they known Mr. Deschamps put us on the express track because we were passing through Haynes Town Station, we would have no choice but stop. What then? Throwing the engine in reverse comes first to my mind. Parking their automobile near the tracks gave away their position leaving us time to back away starting from a safe distance. The more I thought about their scheme the futility of its underpinning became apparent. To stop the *Number 435* without bringing about a spectacular catastrophe one of the villains must stowaway on it. The Austrian spy Aloisa stealthily seized control of Mr. Creswell's special train without firing a shot. Clarence and Ruppert could but it isn't in their nature. I knew it straight off: they are knights-errant.

Now I have a battle scar and a badge of treachery: that's the price for staying alive. I never come home empty-handed. Phillip told me the true object of war is preventing somebody from killing you. The obvious means of doing so are depriving the enemy of the materials to wage war, reduce the number of soldiers in the enemy's ranks, or inflict terrible damage upon the state that supports the conflict.

****

Cato thanked Mr. Hennessy and Sheriff Smallwood for their warning. He sent Ella and I bouquets and silver knobbed ladies' walking sticks. Like Florence, he is arming the men who work for him. The *Messenger* published an account of our adventure with the sensational byline "Wheels of Death." Fortunately, Mr. Hennessy respectfully downplayed my role in the slaughter. There is something grotesquely unsporting about fourteen men in dinky automobiles going up against 150 tons of locomotive, not to mention two dapper gentlemen whose preferred defensive strategy is blowing up the threat.

It's now September. My birthday is next Friday. I'll be twenty-four years old. The last five years forced me to grow up faster than I expected but the silly rough-and-tumble tomboy hasn't

lost her delight in play. That said, it is time to resume my narrative of the enquiry into the attempts to abduct Emma Waddell that turned into the Arthur Mallet investigation that evolved into local war.

Consequences

Overnight, Mr. Creswell and his government colleagues commenced their own investigation into the assault upon our special train. That its purpose was fulfilling an arrangement to transfer the bonds into the custody of federal agents was sufficient cause. Also, it was an armed attempt to rob a train. Miss Saunders confessed to being employed by Joe Griggs to serve as guide for the "special constables" up through 1912 and then offered her services to "outsider businessman" Ted Dillard, the wartime king of vice and up and coming overlord of the local bootleg liquor trade. Arless and Parnell were his underlings so after their blunder he skipped off before the big city bosses made him pay. Her final employer was Philo "Smoky" Grimes, the benighted strategist behind the "Battle for Number 435." He perished in the great arc, a victim of the "Shoot-em-up" Wilkes Rifle Company. Miss Saunders and Mr. Arless are awaiting trial. The men who survived the battle confessed and agreed to testify against the surviving members of the Grimes Clan involved in a plethora of crimes. So, where does the leadership of the "New Griggs Gang" fit in? They were not involved in any of it. Arthur Mallet's scheme to bait Hiram Grady into destroying himself cleared away their rivals. Regardless, our obvious adversaries have yet to win one battle, their bosses, on the run or deceased. For now, our investigation is at a standstill, so Mr. Hennessy assigned Liz and I to other duties.

Once again, in our efforts to solve one mystery we are left with a tangle of loose ends. Where is Arthur Mallet, Walter Pierce, and Michael Shaw? Why did Howard Cowan established Mallet & Grady? What happened to Hiram Grady, Clyde Parnell, Nat Moore, Zack Colton, Billy Fields, Gil McEvers, and the men kidnapped by the 'special constables?' Who killed Judge Phelps, Fred Wheeler, Joe Griggs, and probably Pete Bresnahan?

****

Yesterday, Tom Phales dropped by the office for a visit to share some news. Coroner Cordell told Sherriff Smallwood that the antique military revolver found inside the oak chest that Grady stole from Mrs. Hall might be connected to a thirty-year-old unsolved murder. In 1914, Mr. Culver's workmen uncovered the remains of an unidentified man on the grounds of the Old Haynes Plantation site in Northeast Township. Later, Chester extracted a ball of the type used in that firearm from an old tree nearby. The coroner is convinced that it is the same projectile that passed through the skull of the unidentified man. Since the revolver belonged to the late Captain Hall, he might have been the prime suspect in an imaginary past investigation. The sheriff laughed. "Imaginary past? All the physical evidence that suggests that somebody committed this crime is current. A past investigation wouldn't take place without it. If we advance further with this relic case it will be through the whims of chance." Unofficially, he is inclined to believe the remains belong to Pete Bresnahan, and Captain Hall murdered him.

1920

Happy New Year, Ladies; it's me again, Myrna Eloise Levesque, that very tall twenty-four-year-old, brown-eyed brunette who is sometimes beautiful despite having a scar from a bullet on her left arm. No matter: those rascals will never try that again. Hurrah, it's 1920! Even so, we had an auspicious autumn: Ella married Louis McNair; Agnes Tedder married her aviator Cornelius Ashcraft; Liz and Chief Inspector Hennessy have yet to announce their engagement; my fellow

Phillip Quince has a dog; and Mrs. Keane finally figured out that a tablespoon of horseradish wouldn't poison us. Ella and Louis moved into a new brick Colonial Style house on the southeast corner of Fifteenth and Mulberry in Sam Culver's *University Gardens*. It is a block away from Mrs. Osbourne's *Academy for Young Ladies*, and further down Chestnut, the anchor of the neighborhood is Mr. Buchanan's grand home. Phillip purchased the little cottage nearby at Fourteenth and Mulberry across from County Cemeteries. It has a large fenced-in yard for the dog. (I have yet to see his furry companion, but he assured me that it wasn't a wooly hundred-pound white sled dog with a loud bark and sharp teeth.) Personally, I find suburban tranquility disconcerting. The absence of racket makes me think something is terribly amiss. (Even our domestic milieu lacks spice without Ella's witty exchanges with Mrs. Keane.)

In case you don't remember, I'm now a full-fledged railroad detective. Well, the gentlemen who complicate my life, namely company attorney Oscar Buchanan and the afore mention chief inspector, agreed many years ago that I could qualify for the profession, but on the condition that my permanent post must be at corporate headquarters. Drats! So, I am liaison between the Railroad's Legal Department and Sheriff Smallwood. When there is an investigation of common interest, we collaborate. You might think this is awkward work for a now and then 'society lady,' but we have a congenial arrangement, particularly since my grandfather is the topmost donor to the sheriff's reelection campaign. My winter holiday is going the way so many other good things went in the past: it's time to pay Mr. Hennessy a visit. Here we go!

"Happy New Year, Myrna. What's in the box?"

"Assorted cookies! I baked these especially for you. Uh-oh, it looks like Ella had the same idea. That's what happens when your sister gets married. No matter: you'll shed the extra pounds in no time – ha-ha-ha! What's my new assignment?"

"Everything remaining unfinished with the investigation into the attempts to abduct Emma Waddell.

"Alrighty, aside from tracking down Hiram Grady, Clyde Parnell, and Nat Moore, or their remains, the identity of the party who rigged the steam tug to explode remains unknown, and we still have yet to apprehend the driver of the Hudson waiting at Unity Bluff. If I'm correct, Mr. Creswell didn't squeeze any useful clues from Miss Saunders and friends."

"Nothing that can help us. Besides that, he's too busy building evidence against Alfred Cowan for his multitudinous financial wrongdoings. Sheriff Smallwood isn't faring better. His force is overwhelmed with shutting down the fly-by-night shady saloons that sprung up after Joe Griggs and Philo Grimes toppled into oblivion. Nevertheless, Deputy Phales is still working on the open investigations. With a little help, he might make some progress. Since you have nothing better to do, you'll be assisting him; and this time, Miss Buchanan is joining you."

"Who will attend to all the paperwork?"

"Captain Johnston."

"I thought he retired!"

"No, he stepped down from his position with the station police, took a clerical job in the freight warehouse during the fall, and I hired him to take over Elizabeth's office duties. The investigative work she undertook last summer prompted her to request reassignment. Since Ella is supervising the women station officers, you will need a moderating influence."

"Liz is an exceptional influence!" He cleared his throat.

"Mr. Buchanan said that she spends every afternoon with you anyway. What are you two doing?"

"Silliness!"

With my sister settled into her position as supervisor of the women station officers and married life, she has little time for camaraderie and sundry antics. While she still enjoys baking delicious cakes and cookies, her interests in parlor tricks and acting went out the window. Fortunately, Liz stepped in to fill the void. Upon getting off work, she switches off her genteel perfection for playtime. We have wonderful fun doing all sorts of foolishness; and occasionally, set aside some time for productive pondering.

****

It's freezing outside yet beads of perspiration are rolling down her face. Eighteen minutes have pass since Liz started *Set Sixteen*, and she is determined to complete the challenge. Two summers ago, Ella created this simple and extremely difficult parlor trick to entertain our classmates. They are two silver plated lengths of thin twisted link steel chain connected at center by an ordinary welded link. They look like jewelry. She calls them *Chancy Chain Bracelets*. Each adjusted length of chain is secured snugly around a wrist with a miniature padlock. There are different sets of these locks, some are easier to open than others. In her version of the trick the sets are chosen at random by pulling a numbered disk from a velvet pouch. We perform it as a test of speed and added ten more sets of locks of gradually increasing difficulty. The most frustrating aspect of the challenge aside from laboring hands bound so close together is the locks flop around while trying to work the pick. Behind our backs it is far more difficult. Needless to say, we are up to performing it the hard way.

“Ah-ha, twenty-two minutes, and she freed a hand!” The other is easy.

“There, we’re even! They’re more difficult than cuffs.”

“That all depends on the locks. If you’re playing for an audience, getting loose too early makes the trick appear easy. Pretend that your struggling. If it is taking a long time, you must entertain them with witty jabbering to keep them interested. Did you sew that little pocket inside your boot to hide your packet of lockpicks?”

“Yes. There within reach when I need them.”

“Good. You never know when the “special constables” will take you.”

“So, I’ve heard. What are the chances of that happening to us?”

“Better than slight but don’t take my word for it. I’m the only lady at corporate headquarters with a bullet scar on her arm.”

“The other ladies don’t roll up their sleeves.”

Musings on our frosty walks

As one might expect, the breeze coming off the river was frigid. It channeled between corporate headquarters and the Unity Station building following Rose Street to the beginning of the terrace at Fifth. Since Liz parked her automobile on Second near the former site of Cowan Cotton & Fabric, we had an exhilarating stroll of three blocks in icy wind before taking refuge inside her mobile icebox. Usually visiting with me until she left to join her daddy for a late dinner, it seemed more practical to have her park in our drive and then we walk the five blocks to corporate headquarters. Not anticipating any improvements in the weather over the next six weeks, Liz suggested bundling up for the hike, including thick mufflers to protect our lovely faces. We assumed the appearance of featureless piles of draperies. Nevertheless, our heavy layers of insulation allowed for a more leisurely walk. After two days of this invigorating diversion, a splendid thought occurred to me.

“Our assignment might be simpler than it seems. Those who rigged the steam tug to explode wanted to deprive Clyde Parnell of his means of independently transporting moonshine, not foil

his arrangement with Hiram Grady. If Max Arless knew about the shipment of liquor onboard the tug but nothing concerning the vessel's primary role, it is also doubtful that Parnell's competition was not privy to better intelligence."

"Myrna, why do you sound more convincing when your revelations bring us back to having no clues?"

"It now appears that the blowing up of the tug is separate from the kidnaping of Miss Waddell, the result of a squabble between bootleggers. Clayton and Groves were supposed to unload the moonshine at Haugh Landing and then proceed to one of the slips at Whitaker's wharf to aid the escape of the kidnappers. Arless seized the tug while those two were taking on wood at Sics Landing, so the original plan when out the window. We have secondhand intelligence suggesting that he told his men to dock the tug at Whitaker's wharf so a crew could remove the crates after dark. Neither Parnell nor Arless gains if all of the illicit liquor goes down with the ship. I can imagine a third party placing a couple or three crates of explosives in the hold when the vessel was being loaded with Laine County corn liquor. It wouldn't be the Grimes clan because it is their product. So, the third party is getting even with Parnell for cutting them out of a big shipment. Any ideas?"

"The Northeast River Navigation Company comes to mind, but there are several vessels carrying on commerce under that franchise; and after the sheriff raided one of them and found nothing, Lester Whitaker is apt to file suit if there is a repeat."

"There several aspects about that assumption that don't fit. If the tug exploded while tied off at Whitaker's wharf, the entire structure and perhaps Lester's boat would have been destroyed. The second thing that bothers me is there was steam in the boiler when Arless' men left the tug unattended. Out of the fear of being caught, they might have run off before finishing their duties, or they were in league with the party that placed the explosives."

"That doesn't help. If there was a time bomb, it could have been set while the tug was in the basin at the salvage yard, when the cargo of moonshine was loaded at Willard Grimes Landing, or while Arless' men were at Sics Landing. If the tug deviated from the estimated time of its arrival at the preferred location, then the outcome would be quite different. Since it seems likely Philo Grimes, Max Arless, and Lester Whitaker are not responsible for the explosion, then an outside party wanted either to gain control of the transport of moonshine or prevent Emma from revealing who had the bonds. In both cases, it would be a professional criminal organization that had members possessing the expertise for the act. Recall that one big city boss was attempting to persuade Willard Grimes to cede control of Laine County moonshine distillation to him. On the other hand, the only party that would benefit from silencing Emma was Arthur Mallet and associates. Note also that the only part of this debacle that occurred on time was the abduction of Emma. Aside from Parnell, Clayton, and Groves, only the boss overseeing the 'special constables' would know that. I see the hands of outsiders all over this. Finally, we have Philo Grimes futile attempt to rob the special train. I doubt whether he take such a risk for bonds of uncertain value which must be redeemed through a financial house specializing in foreign securities. Somebody outside was paying him to prevent them from falling into the hands of the government. That could be Mallet, Grady, or Cowan. At the time of the tug explosion, Grady needed Emma alive. Only Mallet and Lawson knew who was holding the bonds. Hitherto, we have not considered the possibility that Cowan had a motive for acquiring them. His company is now bankrupt."

"I was hoping that we were done with Mallet, his associates, and Cowan. Mr. Creswell is sorting through their mess, and the bonds are in safekeeping. If Deputy Phales is working on the case, he probably is looking for clues in our backyard. One thing we know about the outsiders is

that they can't do anything without enlisting the aid of locals despite the latter's history of getting themselves killed. One group that we know little about is the reconstituted Griggs Organization. The original was skilled at manifold categories of illegal business without their leadership ending up in jail. They hired outsiders to make enemies and possible sellouts disappear. When somebody becomes a liability, they vanish. At the same time, Joe Griggs had his secret payroll: if he went down, everybody went with him. The new organization probably employs the same methods but is less visible. Emma recalled that Florence thought Lester Whitaker was in league with Griggs."

"Florence is a maniacal wild woman!"

"She certainly is athletic. Is she stronger than you?"

"Certainly not! I outperformed her in gymnasium class in every competition except swimming and running, but none of the other girls was a close second. Of course, secretly we indulged a common delight in horseplay and tussling."

"The fellows call that wrestling."

"I think brawling is more accurate. Well, to her credit, Florence stood up against Dick Browning. That said, I don't think he hired those devils to kidnap her. In her statement to Sheriff Smallwood, Florence mentioned seeing irregularities in the accounts of Whitaker & Blackwell. Mostly the substitution of copper sheets and tubing from inventory for iron pipe and brass fittings, all charged to the Northeast River Navigation Company. The sums balanced for the audit, but the inventory didn't match. Old man Whitaker and Orrin Blackwell were too occupied with handing over extortion money to Dick Browning to fret over missing inventory."

"Unfortunately, Myrna, we have only Florence's word for it; and without examining the eight-year-old records, there's no proof. All the same, I wager there is some truth in it. For the longest time, the sheriff doubted the accuracy of her recollections concerning the kidnapping. After Chester Wilkes and you discovered where she was held, the gentleman thinks twice before dismissing her conclusions out of hand. Yet, despite a history of disappointing results, she continues to sleuth."

"The lady doesn't sleuth, she snoops. Her methods are purely intuitive, and occasionally risky. It was after Clarence and Ruppert offered their assistance her quest assumed a more coherent direction. Enough of that. We must educate ourselves in the present state of the regional bootleg liquor market. Since Sheriff Smallwood is waging a persistent campaign against it, I think our collaboration with Deputy Phales might point us in the right direction.

Our meeting with Deputy Phales

Upon arriving at his usual post, a desk prominently positioned in the great hall of the courthouse jail, Deputy Phales loaded down Liz with the stack of documents that must be signed to collaborate with Sheriff Smallwood's department in accordance with the joint agreement. Anticipating she was eager to jump into the thick of it, he gave her all the legal forms for participating in clandestine investigations and training that I had signed as the need arose. Deputy Phales removed the special card from my file.

"Everything on this applies to her?"

"Yes, sir." Liz nodded. By noon, her personnel paperwork was complete, and the sheriff swore her in. Good enough!

"Time to get on with work."

****

In the months following the downfall of Philo Grimes and his cohort, the supply of bootleg liquor remained inexplicably steady. Sheriff Smallwood shut down numerous establishments

dispensing it, but each time confiscated no more than a two-day allotment. That was all that the bosses in the new organization provided. Deputy Phales assumed that this was a strategy for conserving product and spreading out the risks. He is convinced that somewhere in the county the new gang is storing copious quantities of moonshine. I pondered the map spread across his desk.

"Any clues?" He laughed, and then removed a one-gallon glass jug from a locked cabinet.

"Florence Phelps took this from a crate on the boatyard wharf when the crew was occupied."

"Goodness!"

"Like I've said time and again, that lady has no reservations about taking big risks."

"So, she was right about captains who dock there overnight transporting moonshine."

"I suppose so, mixed in with their legitimate cargo to throw us off. We must follow those shipments from origin to destination to begin dismantling the organization."

"How do we do that?"

"I don't know. We're spread thin." At this point, Liz entered the discussion.

"Sir, we happen to know an aviator who is married to one of our employees. During the war, he took photographs over enemy lines, downed several of their aeroplanes and dirigibles, and dropped bombs on their trenches. He has a marvelous new machine for starting an express delivery service, though I am not sure whether there would be much call for it. However, it might prove useful for surveilling the desolate sectors of the county, or even those forestlands upriver where moonshine is produced. What do you think?"

"How would he know where to go?"

"It is a two-seater."

"That sounds like a job for Chester. He knows that section better than anyone. The initial objective would be finding where they are warehousing the reserve. My guess is a barn. From the air, the numerous vehicles coming and going would give it away. Are you ready to visit Florence?" I cringed.

****

The most encouraging aspect of this assignment is that we are trying to determine what is happening in the present. Hitherto, much of our efforts have been concentrated upon discovering particulars about previous events, and sometimes, those that happened in years long past. I suppose most can make a reasonable assessment of weather conditions if they can observe it directly with their senses. Predicting it is more difficult: the further in the future a meteorologist makes a prediction, using every scientific instrument, available charts, and rigorous statistical calculations, it still less accurate. Events that occurred in the past present a similar problem: as time passes, the opportunities to acquire more knowledge about individuals, societies, events, objects, landscapes, and so forth diminishes. The investigator is left with official documents, photographs, newspaper accounts, drawings, personal diary entries, letters, and artifacts after all those who could provide firsthand testimony are deceased. It never ceases to surprise me that so much knowledge about ordinary life and places goes unrecorded. We are left with only enough to make conjectures. Historical knowledge is limited; scientific knowledge is selective and useful only within a well-defined context; conjecture is an excuse for not knowing enough.

Visiting with Florence

Riding along with Deputy Phales is never dull. He takes off with a lurch forward and accelerates to top speed. Never slowing for bumps and depressions, the gentleman simply charges forth. Adding to the novelty on this occasion was near freezing temperatures. Arriving at Florence's farm we were met by her stalwart advance guard, each armed with a rifle. After stating

the purpose of our visit, they waved us through. Continuing up the drive, Tom past another armed man who directed him to park out of view behind the house. Having experienced this ritual previously, it hardly gave me cause to worry. Liz felt uneasy. After Florence emerged from the back door toting a shotgun, her mouth dropped.

"Howdy, Florence! I brought along Hennessy's girls for our chat. Recognize this one?" She laughed.

"Liz, the Prankster! The only girl in the dormitory everybody wanted to strangle. I'll never forget the time when she removed the screws from our doorknobs. Most noticed going in, but a few, like me, ended up trapped inside after pushing through the turn stim. The girls got even." Liz looked sheepish. "They poured glue into her boots. I recommended dumping the rest of the can on her head, but Jane Deschamps thought that was too mean." Ha-ha-ha! "It looks like your saucy lady friend detective decided to come along, too. Better snag her soon, Tom. Unlike you, she's looking better." Deputy Phales gazed upward and shook his head. "I'm just saying." He cleared his throat.

"Are you up to snooping on your own again?"

"I'm ready, Tom!" He groaned. "What? Too cold?" She grinned. "Alright, step inside and make yourselves comfortable. This might take a while."

She wasn't exaggerating. We listened patiently as Florence described each of the vessels she assumed were transporting moonshine from upriver to the wharf at the abandoned boatyard and included details of the little boats that rendezvoused with them to receive a portion of the shipment. Each week, the same men came to pick up their crates. All of this was documented in her notes.

"The larger shipment is offloaded into a truck at Sics Landing. As you well know, there is a footpath passing through the woods connecting that place with the boatyard." Tom shook his head.

"Aren't you concerned about being caught?" She pushed aside the opening of her coat to reveal a gun belt with two revolvers; and on lifting her skirt above the calves, we beheld a sheathed dagger strapped to her right leg. "I suppose that will do. Besides, you can outrun them." Tall, strapping, flaxen-haired, beautiful, and well-armed: uh-huh, Florence is my idea of a *real* dangerous woman!

"Don't worry, Tom. There is enough undergrowth to allow me to observe their work from numerous positions unseen; and I am familiar with all the old wagon roads and paths from the boatyard to Haynes Town. Even if stuck in one place for a while, the crew doesn't abstain from the bottle after the boiler goes cold. By nightfall, most are passed out drunk on the wharf." She handed Tom a map. "The fellows in the little boats use the streams emptying into the river to return to their camps. I've marked them. My men report back to me about our local backwoods boys. They take their crates from the camps to different clearings suitable to bringing in automobiles. All this happens weekly."

"This is close to what Chester was onto several years ago. He could read all the signs of liquor running in the tracks they left behind but never caught anybody in the act. They carry on their handy work in an unpredictable fashion. We must find out where they're hiding the reserves."

"Clarence and Ruppert took that up after you massacred the Grimes gang. Was that Chester's doing?"

"No, Miss Levesque came up with it." My mouth dropped. "Overall, I'd say evenly matched: a dozen armed men in automobiles up against old men, a couple of dandies with goose guns, and Miss Levesque. It was even on both sides. Right, Myrna?"

"I guess so, if you're not counting one hundred and fifty tons of locomotive."

"Show Florence your scar."

"No!"

"Our girl took a bullet in her arm and kept on shooting! So, despite what you read in the *Messenger*, it wasn't a massacre." I cleared my throat.

"Two of Grimes' men survived; well, one died later. I really thing having the locomotive gave us the tactical advantage… and Clarence and Ruppert brought their still busters. Those things look like goose guns but can punch holes in automobiles." Florence laughed. "Chester played a minor role, too. He, his riflemen plus my sister were positioned on the heights. They took down Philo after the locomotive tossed his motor aside." Tom interrupted.

"You should have been there, Florence!" She placed a hand under her chin.

"So, you saved the 'shipment of government silver?' Is that *really* true?"

"No, it was Arthur Mallet's cache of antique bearer bonds. They're probably worthless. That's what Jane and you stirred up by passing letters." Florence tighten her lips.

"I thought we were done with Arthur!" Tom interjected.

"We are! There's that business with bootleggers double crossing bootleggers, the exploding tugboat, crooks wanting to kidnap Emma, and Hiram Grady, that one-man plague upon everybody: that's quite a tangle. At this time, we're only interested in the bootleggers. So, who is behind the moonshine trade now?"

"I told you! Lester Whitaker runs it behind his Northeast River Navigation Company."

"Can you prove it this time?"

"No!"

"Well, if he is, we have a plan to flush him out. By the way, I have a few documents you must sign before going to work for us." Florence looked as bewildered as me. "Now, I expect you to behave yourself, especially when it comes to doing anything that might be illegal. To dissuade you from the slightest temptation, I'm paring you up with Chester." Florence rubbed her forehead while suppressing a grin."

"You know, he's dangerous."

"I'm glad you recognize that. So, are you ready to sign up?" The documents that Deputy Phales presented to Florence included a contract to work as a provisional operative for the sheriff (meaning paid informant or spy), and the sundry wavers pertaining to clandestine investigation releasing his department from liability for mishaps. The remainder were the standard forms pertaining to employment. The provisions of the joint agreement did not apply for obvious reasons: keep your hands out of our pie.

Our fearless aviator

Agnes Tedder and Cornelius Ashcraft met quite by accident (literally) during the summer of 1914. I was there! That summer, Mr. Ashcraft asked Miss Tedder for her hand in marriage. She said yes on the condition that he give up flying. He couldn't do that completely. Instead, he devoted his time to building safer flying machines. Still, their romance continued. When he volunteered for the war, Agnes decided keeping him from flying wouldn't have made a difference. She accepted his proposal – hurrah! Back to my story.

Mr. Ashcraft bought a section of the old Bonham farm about a mile from the trolley line running to the beach. That is his own airfield. He has a barn to store his splendid aircraft, and a few shacks he threw up for business. Sheriff Smallwood was skeptical of using aerial surveillance to track the activity of bootleggers until Cornelius met with him. The sheriff is now all for it. Chester can't wait to go up! They intend to attempt an experimental flight to take photographs when the weather clears. Presently, we are experiencing the usual miserable January mix of

overcast skies, drizzling rain, and a patchy offering of sleet and snow flurries. In the meanwhile, with my engineering mind in gear, I am studying maps to determine where the bootleggers store their reserve. It seemed like a straightforward task in the beginning. A place easily accessed and centrally located in the county seemed the most practical, that is, if they were running a legitimate business. Reducing the risk of losing all in a raid is more important than efficiency. With that in mind, having the reserve divided over several different sites is more strategic. Continuing along this line of thinking, I found myself losing confidence in Florence's assertion that the Northeast River Navigation Company was solely responsible for transporting the product. It might be part of a more complex arrangement including automobiles traveling into and about the county using our wonderful highway. Furthermore, the vessels plying the Northeast River need not distribute moonshine from remote landings. They can carry it directly to the docks in Port Unity if secrecy is maintained. The fall of Philo Grimes means the Laine County distillers no longer have exclusive control of the market. Any number of small-time producers within our county can be added to the volume without drawing attention. Prohibition makes the profit worth the risk. Considering all these factors, Sheriff Smallwood's raids on the "shady saloons" offered the possibility of exploiting the weakness of having an open door to the thirsty.

Liz and Florence

Glorious Liz is an exceptional beauty having a full head of raven hair, a flawless complexion, soft features, sparkling blue eyes, and everything else in perfect proportion. The only unusual elements of her physical perfection is superb muscular development, the result of rigorous exercise and playing. Enjoying acting the part of a proper lady, Liz dresses up, beautifies herself, and never fails to charm; while in an instant, can slip back into her mischievous self, delighting in pranks, roughhousing, and naughtiness. She has her own automobile, and her daddy is not inclined to rein her in. Brilliant, self-confident, independent, and a thoroughly modern woman in every respect: that's why I like Liz. (Ella can't stand her!) Florence is a similar type, except more reserved. Since their reunion, thanks to Deputy Phales, Liz took it upon herself to start visiting Florence. There is nothing out of the ordinary about old college classmates having a get-together for tea, cookies, and target practice. Chester thinks that because Liz is an officer of the law Florence is in safe hands. To a point, he's right. At least, it is an improvement over her overly vigilant armed hands.

When we met with her earlier this month, she was more relaxed, even amusing. Since she and Liz started gadding about, Tom told me Florence is venturing out of her fort, carrying a modest arsenal. He thinks if she continues to improve, there is a good chance of using the friends for clandestine surveillance within Northeast Township. Liz also has an appealing personality that radiates genteel harmlessness. Though far from authentic, she utilizes this role with the public flawlessly. Mr. Hennessy doesn't entirely approve of this arrangement, but Liz proved very capable of working on her own when she helped Emma leave the county in complete secrecy. Liz follows instructions to the letter, and always fulfills her responsibilities. If she wants challenging assignments, he trusts that she would not accept any beyond her skills. It's worth a try. Too many of the residents recognize Chester; and because the bootleg liquor trade offers some rural folks the opportunity to earn a little cash, his usually talkative friends have turned shut mouth.

Phillip's best friend

"That's a big dog!"

"Not really."

"No, Phillip; that *is* a big dog!"

"Watch this, Myrna. Sit, Ornery, sit!" The dog sat down. "Now, stay… good!"

"What else does he do?"

"Bark, Ornery, bark!" He barked. "That's my boy!"

"What else have you taught him?"

"He follows me and likes going for rides."

"Why did you name him Ornery?"

"I didn't. My uncle named him. It sure doesn't fit. He's about as docile as they come."

"Maybe, you misheard. My guess it is Henri. I like it: Captain Quince and his fearless dog Henri save the day – hurrah! See, all that French I took in college is good for something, *Monsieur*. I'm surprised you didn't pick up some of it during the war."

"I did. *Parles-tu anglaise?"*

"Let's go for a ride."

Flying

Phillip and "Henri" accompanied me to Cornelius' field to discuss a technical problem pertaining to aerial photography. To start, he didn't have a camera of any sort, and had no idea how to mount one so Chester could operate it. For a fellow who was skilled in building flying machines, I found that amusing. What type was he familiar with? He used a Kodak A-2 during the war. What is that? It is a metal hand-held camera with a two-plate magazine for taking photographs out of the cockpit of the airplane. We didn't have one. However, Ella and I had our dandy Linhof field cameras and a couple of Brownie No. 2A, *Model A* box cameras. Mr. McNair's extremely heavy modified mahogany case monstrosity takes wonderfully sharp photographs, but you must fiddle with it, change ungainly plates, and whatnot. That's awfully hard to do while suspended upside down inside a hole in the ground. Forget about trying in an airplane. So, what would it be? We must build a framework that was fixed to the airplane, preferably with two cameras pointing down set so the pictures slightly overlap, and somebody could operate it with minimal fuss. That means not changing plates. Alrighty, the Brownie box cameras would work. All we needed to do was attach flexible cables to the knob advancing the film roll and the shutter for each camera, run the cables into the cockpit, and attach them to a lever mounted on a panel. The photographs might not be perfect, but you work with what you have. The alternative was letting me take Chester's place. "I'll take a few excellent bird's eye views at an oblique angle. When Sheriff Smallwood identifies something worth a closer view, we'll build the contraption for a return pass." Cornelius asked whether I had ever been up in an airplane. "No, but I'll pay you to take me up right now. How about you, Phillip? Want to go next?" Reluctantly, he agreed. Marvelous! It was exciting! After we were up, he leveled out, and flew in a straight line to Sandyfield, turned northeast, and then southwest over the river. I could see everything down below, even the ruins of the Haynes Plantation House and all the footpaths leading to the landings. He turned further south, and then we were following the trolley line to the beach. Back to the field – bumpety-bump – and the machine rolled to a stop. Now, it was Philip's turn. While he was getting ready, I took the Linhof from my satchel, set it, and told him to take a photograph for Sheriff Smallwood of anything out near Sandyfield. "Whatever happens, don't lose my camera!" After they were out of sight, I played fetch with Henri. He likes ginger snaps.

I waited and waited. Where were those boys? I sure hope they didn't get into trouble. Eventually, they came in. "Having fun up there? Where have you been?" They saw something interesting a few miles north of Sandyfield. Three automobiles were parked around the tumbledown ruins of the Gus Porter farm. The only road leading to it was the old wagon path off

Sandyfield Road, which eventually connects to the uppermost reach of Commerce Street. That might be a good place to hide the reserve since that line runs east to west through the center of the county. Good enough! We have something to show the sheriff. Cornelius and Phillip were lucky.

Some progress

Upon seeing our photographs, Sheriff Smallwood took a few deputies out to the Gus Porter farm to investigate. Evidence of automobile traffic was readily apparent. There wasn't any good reason for sightseers to venture out to this desolate location. The farm was abandoned in 1858, and nobody ever came forward to claim ownership. It is county property, and deteriorating signs posted on numerous trees indicated that fact explicitly. One structure on the site remained intact. It was a brick smoke house. Inside, the sheriff found two crates, each containing four glass gallon jugs of moonshine. While it wasn't the cache he expected, we now have evidence that supported our assumption that the bootleggers hoarded their reserves in the rural sections of the county.

****

Intuitively, our attention is drawn towards the center of the map. That would be the intersection of Sandyfield Cutoff and Commerce Street/County Road Divide at Sandyfield (the only town at the center of the county). The cutoff is the main road connecting the two branches of our "U" shaped County Highway (I wished the commissioners would find a better name for it). At the intersection, one can drive an equal distance to the Northeast River, the beach, and to wharves at Port Unity. Driving further north on Sandyfield Road, civilization gives way to pine barrens. The forest is cut through with a maze of logging roads. The lumber company put down a narrow-gauge railway to bring timber to two sawmills located between the terminal and disused Independence Ice Company. The latter was where Max Arless imprisoned Parnell's crew when he took over the tugboat. The heirs of Captain Elias Hall own Independence Ice and the abandoned Hall Boatyard, both properties "managed" (or neglected) by Jane Deschamps. While routinely breached by trespassers, the attorney for Hall Shipbuilding Company imposes unnecessary requirements upon the sheriff when he wants to inspect them without seeking a court order.

Ella and the McNair Boys

My basement workshop used to be our gathering place because Mrs. Keene refuses to go down there. Here, we tinkered on sundry contraptions, solved mystifying problems, had "raucous tea parties," and hid our "devious writings." That was when Ella and the McNair Boys joined me; otherwise, Liz stops by almost daily to nap. Sometimes she gives me instructions on beautification. Presently, the old crew reunited to build the aerial photography apparatus. I am having so much fun! Alrighty, silliness aside, Frank designed an electric mechanism to advance the film the exact distance necessary to take a new picture after the shutter lever is depressed. It is part of the camera we are building from disassembled ones bought here and there. The lenses are first rate! Still, the whole assembly is big. Here is the part that's sweet: the camera joins to a box containing mirrors. The latter is mounted to the side of the cockpit and pointed downwards. It's like an upside-down periscope. The operator does not need to lean out of the cockpit to take his photographs. The whole contraption is ungainly, but we are confident it will do the job. If our special camera were fabricated from metal it would be better but that's what we plan for the next version. Ella thinks modifying the mirror box to take pictures around a corner might be useful for investigations on land. Wonderful!

Snowstorm

We had a heavy snow during the first week of February. Afterwards, the sky cleared, but the temperature dropped into the low teens and stayed there for several days. The ground froze solid. Reflecting back on our college years, our winter storm couldn't compare to the months-long encapsulation in layer upon layer of white torment. I drew comfort in knowing that by week's end, Rose Street would transform into a bed of dirty slush. Until then, Mrs. Keane refused to brave the hazards to perform her duties – hurrah! The tyrant's throne was empty! Granddaddy James wanted fried chicken, ham and beans, roast beef and gravy, cornbread, and chocolate cake! Coming up! The kitchen was under my command. Liz, who happens to have an inhuman tolerance for cold, took the trolley from her daddy's home on Chestnut Avenue to Unity Station, and then hiked through the cleared walkways in the passenger yard to reach our rear entrance via the Sixth Street Bridge. Needless to say, she was staying over. Good enough! Mr. Hennessy wanted us to stay home and slog through whatever Sheriff Smallwood expected us to do. That really meant figuring out where what we recently uncovered would lead. Let's start with what Liz and Florence have been up to.

"Florence and I drove to Haynes Town last week. That's where I bought this thick woolen scarf. How do you like it? Oh, these lace-up boots were on sale, too! The clerk told me that they were just the thing for wintry weather – thick soles, flannel lining – just the thing for chasing down the little ones. I asked him whether he was referring to piglets or puppies. He said both. We met up with Emma's friend Suzy at the druggist. She married his boy, oh, what's his name. It'll come to me. That girl still makes dresses for the local ladies. Looking homespun might improve my chances. How do I look in brown?"

"Don't do it! Florence still wears mail order. You don't want to look too country. What about our assignment?"

"The word is going around that a new fellow named Starkey McKay is paying top dollar for feed corn and sweet potatoes. This time of year, driving up the price on both could hurt the small farmers. He doesn't have livestock."

"You can make alcohol from sweet potatoes but I'm not sure it is what he intends. I'd say it's food for the waisters who haul the crates through the woods. They work to eat."

"Most work to live; others live to work; a few create work from nothing. So? *Mors omnia vencit*." What?

"Latin; next you'll be quoting Shakespeare. I suppose *omnia* means everything, not just everybody, so all and everything will simply flicker out eventually? In the words of Clausius (He wasn't Roman), 'The entropy of the universe tends to a maximum.'"

"Most definitely, Myrna!"

"Mr. Hennessy creates special inquiries for us because he knows that we know there's nothing better for us to do. That's why we attended an exclusive college for young ladies! It was our introduction to busy work. The second law of thermodynamics is why everything is here in the first place: living is work; work consumes energy making less of it available for work; work makes more work, and the longer you work the shoddier your work becomes until you fall over and die. No matter: the whole of the universe is on the same trajectory. Now we know the meaning of life: pretending there is a meaning."

"Nice, Myrna! The ancients had it wrong. The party is over until the next one begins except you're not invited. I really enjoy the occasions when we can indulge in girl talk. It's so refreshing, and unstructured!"

"What about the sweet potatoes?"

"He takes a truckload out to Sics Landing every so often. That should tell you something.

"Hear anything about liquor parties?"

"No, but Florence said that seeing a lot of automobiles from town parked anywhere is a giveaway. That means word-of-mouth is circulating in Port Unity beforehand. A certain quantity is dropped at a remote site and whoever "throws the party" picks it up. Cash in advance. That's how it works. So said Florence's hand Buster. Sheriff Smallwood could raid anything in the sticks when we know who is receiving liquor for the party. When the weather improves, we're meeting with a railroad employee named Norton Highsmith. He has a photograph taken from the railroad bridge showing river boats taking on cargo at Sics Landing. If it's useful, we are willing to pay him twenty dollars for it."

"Be careful. Check him out with Mr. Hennessy before setting up any meeting. It could be a trap."

"I'll ask him to send Homer Utley to Haynes Town Station in the guise of a foreman. He's the best at rooting out corrupt employees."

Liz and I spent two days together catching up with our assignment before Mrs. Keane decided it was safe to return. I spent the remainder of the deep freeze typing up my report for Mr. Hennessy and Sheriff Smallwood (since I had nothing better to do). It was apparent to me that we were still early in the assignment. We didn't have the aerial photographs, nothing Starkey McKay did was illegal, and eight gallons of moonshine is not the reserve. For all we know that elusive prize might be spread over the county.

Unexpected find

"I taught Henri a new trick. Henri, say hello to Myrna." He barked and wagged his tail. "That's my boy! Do you want to go for a ride?" He perked up and trotted off to the front door.

"Apparently, he knows what 'ride' means. You haven't asked me about my week."

"Mr. Hennessy told me not to. It's secret."

"It is. That doesn't mean you shouldn't ask. How was your week?"

"Guess what Henri dug up in the back yard?" Drats! He already stopped listening to me. That isn't supposed to happen this early.

"I have no idea!" Phillip produced a burlap sack containing something heavy.

"Reach in."

"No! What is it? Goodness! Don't tell me you brought that nasty thing into the house?" He laughed. "You're getting dirt all over the floor."

"Are you preparing to take over for Mrs. Keane?" I frowned. He pulled out a chunk of headstone. "Look who is buried in the backyard."

"Joseph Haynes? How did he end up here?"

"I have another shovel."

"No! We must notify Coroner Cordell and Sheriff Smallwood. If there are remains here, they must go across the street. That's where they were supposed to be buried after the Episcopal Church burnt down. Goodness! Let me see your deed." He removed a lockbox from the buffet and placed it on the dining room table."

"Phillip, your valuables do not belong in the dining room." On unlocking it, he removed an unopened pint of brandy. "Phillip!"

"It's not illegal to own or drink the prewar stuff. It can't be sold, transported, and… I don't remember the rest."

"Imported, exported, manufactured… yes, but there are a few local ordinances filling the gaps, say, public drunkenness, unlawful gathering, disorderly conduct, noise violations, and other imaginative snags for hauling in drinkers."

"What about your granddaddy's prized scotch?" I don't suppose he remembers Ella's wedding.

"Right. Where's the deed?"

"Want a swig?"

"No."

"May I have a swig?"

"Don't you dare! Save it for our wedding." He finally produced the deed. The grantor, unsurprisingly, was Samual Culver and Associates, Real Estate Developers. I knew that. Reading further, the parcel's description told all.

> BEGINNING at an iron pipe in the south line of a new roadway known as Cemetery Street (now East Mulberry Avenue), said beginning point may be located by starting from a granite monument, set in 1856 by Col. Romulus Simmel, at the entrance of the county cemetery at the center line of said Cemetery Street with the south line of a new roadway known as Fourteenth Street… being a part of Cemetery Tract *Number 20* as shown on Map of County Cemetery Corporation… now University Garden… being conveyed to parties of the first by deed…

In other words, the county sold a presumably unused five-acre tract of the original cemetery to Sam Culver, which was outside the walls when Cemetery Street became the eastern extension of Mulberry Avenue. He renamed the tract University Gardens. After Port Unity annexed it in 1911, he started building a new suburb.

"Phillip, Henri is still waiting at the door for his ride!"

"Where do you want to go?"

"All my research on the Haynes family is in my basement workshop. Mrs. Keane doesn't work on Sundays so you're safe. We can introduce Henri to Granddaddy James. He likes dogs." Henri barked. "Let's go."

****

My previous research on the Haynes family included transcriptions of documents indicating that the four occupants of the Haynes Mausoleum were moved to the burial ground at the Episcopal Church on North First in the 1830s. Following the Great Fire of 1883, the church relocated to Fourth Street, and the remains in the burial ground were reinterred at County Cemeteries. The entries of the Haynes graves in the register are incomplete, not giving a location, nor has anybody found the tombstones (until now). For the next few days, Phillip will be entertaining Coroner Cordell and his assistants. I intend to drop in when time permits to see what they uncover. So, are there remains or only discarded tombstones? If Henri appears on the back porch with a femur that mystery is solved. I'll refrain from providing a narrative of our antics in my basement workshop.

****

I neglected to mention that Phillip is assembling a wireless transmitter and receiver so Cornelius and Chester can report back to Tom if there is trouble. All of them know Morse code.

Ashcraft's Raiders

Bring together any number of determined men to solve a problem, then they're probably going to break something. If they happen to be skilled practitioners in the art and science of breaking things, you have war. Picture if you may, a brotherhood of hazard consisting of Cornelius Ashcraft, Chester Wilkes, Louis McNair, and my own Phillip Quince. Despite having only one airplane, they call themselves Ashcraft's Raiders. Hitherto, they sank a boat, collapsed a barn, and indirectly destroyed a truck carrying moonshine. All thanks to the wireless, automobile, and illusion. It started when Cornelius and Chester tried to photograph vessels taking on cargo at Sics Landing (so Liz might save twenty dollars). They managed to take three clear pictures of the mischief taking place and avoided three volleys of rifle fire from the crew. They were mad! Wouldn't it be nice if they could message the deputies for help? Uh-huh, Phillip fitted out their machine with a wireless. It didn't have the adequate range, so my sister Ella told Phillip to put the problem to Louis. After he designed an antenna to strap to the wing, the signal improved – hurrah for engineers! – and to help the deputies, he built a wireless for his Dodge Brothers motorcar and gave another to Tom. Certainly, Louis' version of the wireless was bulky, but they didn't need to fly. Everything was hunky-dory, except the rifle fire. Ella, the illusionist, suggested that the boys repaint their machine from bright yellow to olive drab, adding the markings of a Bristol F. 2. They had enough aerial photographs for planning, now was the time for aerial surveillance. Obliques from the Linhof field cameras were sufficient. To make the airplane appear formidable, add *faux* machine guns whose barrels emitted bright electrical flashes, and modified a theatrical hand cranked gunshot noisemaker to simulate the rat-a-tat-tat. The rascals would run for cover before realizing it was all for show. All the menfolk liked her ideas. It took the remainder of March to perfect their counterfeit; but when they unveiled it, I was dumbfounded! Splendid! I the first week of April, Ashcraft's Raiders commence their patrol of the Northeast River. They took pictures of dozens of vessels navigating upriver and back without incident. Even so, the sight of a Bristol prompted crews to drop what they were doing and gawk. Had they look closely at the famous bull's eye emblem, they might have noticed there was an earthenware jug at it center. Chester thought it fitting that we didn't aggravate the British. The number painted on the fuselage was 2.71828, the first six digits of the constant known as Euler's Number.

Ten days after the boys commenced their surveillance, they spotted men unloading crates from a vessel and bed of a nearby truck at the wharves at the abandoned Hall Shipyard. They were met with rifle fire when they circled to take more pictures. When our boys responded with simulated machine gun fire the scene below was mindless panic. The driver of the truck tore off toward the gates, his tarp flapping. The captain and his crew retreated to their vessel and cast off. When they were underway, Cornelius executed a loop and then leveled out above the water, heading straight for the wheelhouse. The captain panicked and then ran aground inside the flooded dry dock, busting a hole on the port side when he contacted the masonry. My boys didn't fire simulated shots to frighten them into this recklessness. They merely wanted a close up photograph – ha-ha-ha! Chester tapped out a message to Louis who was waiting at Haynes Town Station. He used the telephone there to report to Sheriff Smallwood. In total, the ruse netted nine crates of moonshine abandoned on the wharves, and another twenty-one in the submerged hold of the boat. The captain and his five-man crew were eventually rounded up. Hurrah!

The day was not over. Cornelius and Chester made ever-widening circles over the immediate area of the boatyard in search of the truck. They spotted it on a logging road, and then ascended. Upon seeing the airplane, the driver made a sharp right turn onto the pathway paralleling the narrow-gauge railroad. His partner fired a rifle upward willy-nilly, but it was out of range. On

reaching the turn onto Sandyfield Road, the driver took it too fast, and crashed into the edge of a barn causing it to collapse not long after the truck pulled away. The rascals raced on; my boys glided above. It soon became apparent to Chester that the rear of the truck was on fire. The impact with the barn shattered some of the moonshine jugs. The driver and his accomplice abandoned the truck in the middle of Sandyfield Road about two miles from where it terminates at the county line. Chester tapped out a message to Louis who remained at Haynes Town Station, and by the time the Sandyfield Fire Brigade arrived, the truck was a smoldering heap a metal. The *Messenger* published a thrilling, somewhat factual account of the events entitle "SHERIFF SMALLWOOD DECLARES WAR ON BOOTLEGGERS." It included a photograph of the members of Ashcraft's Raiders posing in front of their convincing replica of a Bristol with Philip and Louis proudly hoisting their bulky wireless telegraphs. Unfortunately, they neglected to remove the mock twin machine guns. While the public was enthralled with the three veterans of the late war and their commander, the celebrated Chester Wilkes, pulling off such an audacious attack upon the "shadowy empire of the liquor lords" was nothing short of an invitation to escalate the conflict. The county commissioners were appalled that Sheriff Smallwood employed weapons of war to enforce the law and had acquired them without proper authorization. The governor called on him personally to discuss how he managed the purchase of a military aircraft from a foreign government without going through proper channels. It didn't end there! There was the matter of dropping bombs on a commercial vessel and vehicle travelling on a public road. These concerns were quickly set aside when these officials were allowed a closer examination of Ashcraft's machine. Anybody who served in the war could tell at a glance it was not a Bristol, nor was it like any used on either side. Clearly, it was designed for commercial purposes. The damage to the "liquor boat" was unquestionably the fault of the captain, and there was no evidence of damage caused by machine gun fire, explosives, or any object dropped from the sky. The same applied for the moonshine truck. The fire was the result of the ignition of alcohol. Early on, it became apparent that the *Messenger* embellished his account of the events. In the end, Sheriff Smallwood received praise for his "transformative integration of mobile wireless telegraphy and aerial reconnaissance" into traditional law enforcement methods. The sheriff is one of the gifted few who can turn potential controversies into a celebration of his genius. Missing from the narrative was Mr. Hennessy, the true enabler of the plan. He was growing uneasy with the joint agreement. In addition to utilizing the skills of four railroad employees and one contractor, only deputies Phales and Wilkes were expected to participate in the aerial surveillance and survey project. The county paid the company employees low hourly wages, and reimbursed Mr. Ashcraft for the fuel he used. The railroad paid all other expenses; and by now, they were mounting. While he was more than happy to lend out "Elizabeth" and "The Girl," Deputy Phales assigned Liz to covert investigation with Florence Phelps, the county's uncontested dangerous woman. Mr. Hennessy had little choice but send his most experience railroad detective Homer Utley to watch out for them. As usual, he is confident that Deputy Phales will keep me safe – ha-ha-ha! Regardless, Mr. Buchanan wants the county to assume a greater portion of the cost of aerial surveillance, train their own wireless operators, and pay railroad employees rendering services an amount comparable to the wages they receive from the company. Aside, Sheriff Smallwood is gaining a reputation for heavy-handedness.

****

Jane Deschamps is seeking salvage rights for the vessel partially submerged in the flooded drydock since the boatyard was willed to her ward Miles. It is registered to E. L. McKay Produce in Wayne City. The captain told Tom that Starkey McKay is the nephew of their employer. Said

Starkey with his two accomplices skipped off after his truck caught fire. The owner of the collapsed barn wants the county to compensate him for the loss of his property. The matter will be settled in court.

Results

For several weeks after "Ashcraft's Raiders" curtailed the replenishment of the moonshine supply, the local reserve dwindled to a trickle. Sheriff Smallwood had few "shady saloons" to shut down due to a dearth of product in the marketplace. Understandably, the remaining stock became awfully expensive. After this precipitous dip, business made a booming recovery. The bootleggers devised a strategy to work around aerial surveillance and wireless telegraphy. How? Apparently, they were not using the boatyard and the several secluded landings on the Northeast River to offload their goods. There were other noticeable changes. The so-called "outsider businessmen" in the Northside made a quick exit after Starky McKay and associates lost the big shipment. Sheriff Smallwood called a meeting to tell us what he learned from the captain and crew of the wrecked *Mackerel.*

"As we expected, outsider 'businessmen' are playing a part in delivering moonshine from upriver. Starkey McKay and his uncle set up their 'produce company' in a low rent Wayne City office building in the fall. The company's list of their physical assets at that time included a forty-year-old commercial riverboat *Mackerel*, and three delivery trucks. Starkey rented the disused Grissom store on the outskirts of Sandyfield under the pretext of starting a wholesale produce business. Since the captain provided us with the regular course of the vessel, we are certain that shipments of grain were taken onboard at Wayne City and delivered to Willard Grimes Landing in Laine County. On the downriver trip, they unloaded moonshine, on the wharves of the old boatyard. On the return trip, they took on a load of legitimate produce for Wayne City at Haynes Town. I've been informed by the Chief of Police at Wayne City that McKay Produce vacated their office without notice. Our irksome outsiders in the Northside did likewise. The big city crooks failed at their attempt to take over the whole bootlegging operation. Now, the locals have resumed control." Mr. Hennessy groaned. "However, I have some good news. After the recent commotion, Jane Deschamps finally agree to have the wharves dismantled and then fence in the riverside. She intends to salvage the *Mackerel* first." Mr. Hennessy responded in an exasperated tone.

"According to the joint agreement, we collaborate on investigations of common interest. Those happen to be the attempts to abduct Miss Emma Waddell and the destruction of the tug resulting in the damage of the railroad's property and that of our patrons. Though the cause of the latter is still in dispute, the employer of the individuals in control of the vessel at the time of the explosion must be identified. The same holds true for a possible outside party who possibly perpetrated an act of sabotage on the same. It's difficult to separate the steam tug incident from bootleggers, and the fiend Grady employed them to do his dirty work, but it is my understanding that the McKay operation was not active in the region prior to the demise of Philo Grimes and his organization."

"We did not know outsider businessmen set up a rival enterprise until we captured the crew of the *Mackerel*. Nothing new: Max Arless pirated the tug from Parnell with the intention of selling its cargo to the outsiders."

"That brings us full circle back to the Northeast River Navigation Company: the only player in this protracted mess to benefit from driving out rivals. They have a long history of suspicious activity dating back to the reign of Boss Griggs and have demonstrated the ability to carry on their business without being caught in the act. The only physical evidence you have to date is the gallon

of moonshine that Miss Phelps stole from an unattended crate while trespassing. It could have been from a Northeast River Navigation vessel or the *Mackerel*. That brings me to the informant Norton Highsmith. Our Detective Utley followed him to Lester Whitaker's boat when it docked at Haynes Town wharf. The captain spoke with Norton briefly, passed him an envelope, they laughed, and parted company. We can only speculate what that was about; however, it established a connection between the Northeast River Navigation Company and the informant to Florence's informant. That prompted 'Ashcraft's Raiders' to concentrate their surveillance to that few miles of the river. Aside, I wonder why the newcomers would choose to break bulk at the boatyard since it has a reputation for unsavory activities."

"Until we introduced aerial reconnaissance and wireless communication, any useful intelligence about the site was stale by the time it reached our department; and it's a remote location conceal by forest and fronting the river."

"Concerning your enhancements, it would be advantageous if you develop a code for wireless transmissions since this improvement is now public knowledge. Furthermore, you should hire Mr. Ashcraft on as a permanent employee of your department. Once you introduce an effective solution to address a perennial nuisance, it is a political liability to return to unproductive methods. Whatever you decide, Elizabeth Buchanan and Myrna Levesque are assign to assist your department in the afore mention investigations. From this point forward, they are not authorized to enlist the services of other railroad employees in achieving that end, whether for compensation or gratis, and this includes in their free time. Mr. Buchanan does not want the company exposed to litigation arising from spectacular adventures. I have assigned Detective Utley to aid Miss Buchanan in her clandestine work. This does not apply for Miss Levesque since she is working with your personnel, and as liaison to your department, she must provide reports to me. Furthermore, we do not want Miss Buchanan and Miss Levesque working together on clandestine investigations." Drats!

Frankie Gilliam

Tom recruited a returning veteran named Francis "Frankie" Gilliam to haunt the docks and sundry risky venues to gather intelligence. He possesses a remarkable mind seated within a shell of an unremarkable personality. Nobody would peg him for anything more than one of the countless men who returned from the war in search of a purpose. He could go unnoticed anywhere – the perfect spy. That's a skill that I must learn.

The tombstones

Coroner Cordell and his assistants unearthed the fragments of tombstones for the other three members of Joseph Haynes' family but no remains. He speculated they were carted from the Episcopal Church burying ground and left for the grave diggers, side by side, and lying flat. The job was never done. The stones were about two inches thick and about ninety years old, so weathering probably cause them to break, if the move had not. The remains are still in the burying ground, now Lavinia Hall's backyard.

Startling developments

The big news is Cato Houghton is dead. Last night, after leaving the scrap metal yard near Unity Bluff, he drove his automobile off the dirt road running through the swamp, continued forward running half-off the embankment, eventually tumbling over, sinking driver side first into

the muck. According to the Messenger, he managed to climb out but bled to death from his injuries walking back to his business. I happened to like him.

Ella was sad to hear about Cato. She was especially fond of him. Major Durant said that he prevented the outsiders from taking over and kept Boss Griggs in check. We could be in for some trouble north of the terminal. That is a weak point. There is sufficient office space in the new truck depot beyond the upper yards to set up a new station police office. Additionally, there should be a watchman's hut on the road leading into the new neighborhood of company-owned houses for the workers. There is nothing we can do about the Eighth Street access to the upper yards since it is part of the public way. The city is pushing the state to construct a bridge for automobiles alongside the railroad bridge crossing the river at Unity Bluff. Hopefully, the county might consider building a highway bridge over the terminal at Third Avenue to connect to it, thus alleviating the traffic on Fourth and Eighth. This would also allow for direct access to the growing Northside.

Cato's funeral

An impressive throng of residents joined in the funeral procession on foot starting from the Fourth Street Presbyterian Church, proceeding ten blocks east on Mulberry, and concluding at the grave site at County Cemeteries. Present were the officers of the Popular Coalition, the membership of the Neighborhood Committee of Public Safety, workers from Houghton Metalworks & Scrap and the Board of County Commissioners, Cato's political rivals Sheriff Smallwood and Samuel Culver, and well-wishers such as Mayor Howard Lowe. Grandaddy James, Major Durant, Ella, and I attended the services in the church and joined in the procession. Orrin Blackwell gave the eulogy.

Some progress

This week, Frankie Gilliam saw a well-dress gentleman discussing business with Lester Whitaker after the latter's steamboat docked. An elderly mariner chatting with Frankie pointed out the former as Edgar Branch, "the bigshot who took over after Boss Griggs had his 'swimming accident,' in other words, the new head of the Griggs Organization. "He has his men inside high places in this section. Well, not so much here, but Laine County is full of them! Lester there, he's a sly rascal. He makes money hand over fist and doesn't give a hoot how he does it. Though just about everybody knows he gets liquor from upriver, but anybody who knows how isn't telling. In fact, he's so good, even the sheriff with his aeroplanes can't figure out how he's doing it." Detective Homer Utley, in his conversations with other railroad men working at Haynes Town Station, confirmed what Frankie heard from the old mariner. Edgar Branch is the successor to Boss Griggs, and his inner circle, like Lester Whitaker, run legitimate businesses. They are only interested in cornering the local illegal liquor market. The organization doesn't manufacture or dispense the product. They transport it and control the supply through hording. Nobody knows how they do it. Cornelius and Chester want to find out. They make regular passes over the Northeast River and County Highway. So far, they've documented the removal of the wrecked *Mackerel* and the dismantling of the boatyard wharf. The decking of the latter are stacked alongside the other junk in the rear yard. There's no evidence of fence building. I can imagine Jane decided that there was no need for it since the wharf was gone. Finally, Liz (who has been enjoying the life of a country woman) and her pal Florence plan to attend a "social" this Saturday. Homer Utley, in his clandestine role as a member of a section crew, will accompany the ladies.

Liquor Parties

There isn't any point in throwing a party if nobody knows about it, so there are several effective ways to spread the word to your friends without leaving an open door to those that you prefer not attend. These methods don't help with liquor parties because they *are not* parties. To start, there isn't a cake! Major Durant and Sheriff Smallwood use the term "shady saloons." I think that is more accurate, and Mr. Hennessy groups all marts of vice as "hole in the wall establishments." Polite Southerners have euphemisms for everything harsh or unseemly. Objectively, "liquor party" includes any temporary location were bootleg distilled spirits are sold, either bottled or by the drink. If you want a party, take a jug home, and invite your friends. Those folks who linger at the shady saloons must drink or leave. Florence's tattler Buster told Liz that Liquor Parties in the sticks are quite different. They're held in a barn, somebody's house, an open field, and sometimes in the woods. Boiled peanuts, catfish stew, cornbread, and sometimes a whole pig are served. The moonshine table is set up out of sight. At first glance, it looks like what has gone on in the country for generations. However, the fellow selling the liquor pays for food; when his jugs run dry, he leaves, and the party continues. In the days before Prohibition, bar rooms gave away sandwiches and pickles for free so the patrons would drink more, not too many folks turn down free food even though it really isn't free. Getting folks to attend is easy because they call the event a harvest celebration, lodge picnic, or any innocuous excuse for a gathering. Nevertheless, they are not as profitable as the dispensaries in town; however, selling pint jars from a vegetable wagon is satisfactory for solitary drinkers, and it makes a profit. The way to make money with the shindigs and increase sales is to entice city folks to take a little drive in the country. Tom is especially keen on infiltrating the crowd attending one of these gatherings. No raids. The purpose is to observe, paying close attention to those who provide the liquor. Homer thinks likewise. Florence is beginning to behave more relaxed since gregarious Liz is keeping her company. She leaves her farm modestly armed with a petite revolver in her bag like her old classmate.

More surprises

Hello, Ladies! Sheriff Smallwood decided not to run for another term. Chester Wilkes is taking his spot on the ticket. After hearing about it secondhand, I get a chance to speak with him on Saturday. Sheriff Smallwood is bringing Mr. Wilkes over to introduce him the Granddaddy James – Ella and I are cooking our fried chicken. We like him.

Cato's secret

Thursday, an attorney representing the estate of Cato Houghton visited Sheriff Smallwood. He presented him with a thick sealed envelope addressed to "Herbert William Smallwood, Esq." It contained a detailed account of the 1890 murder of Pete Bresnahan. The participants included Captain Elias Hall, George Smallwood (Sheriff Smallwood's father), John Culver (Sam's father), Alan Deschamps, Joe Griggs, Fred Wheeler, Dick Browning, and Calvin Houghton (Cato's father). Beatrice Smallwood Culver was present and young unwilling Cato drove the buckboard in which the lynching party placed Pete. They took him out to the ruins of the old Haynes plantation house on the Northeast River, tied him to a tree, and then took turns lashing him with a whip. After a while, they gathered around the fire to drink and take a vote on whether to continue. There was a grave dug for him in a patch outside the Haynes family burial ground, but nobody had nerve to finish the job. George Smallwood wanted to row Pete across the river and tell him never to set foot in the county again. That wouldn't do for Captain Hall. He gave Joe his revolver and then ordered him to put Pete out of his misery. He did. (The antique revolver that Sheriff Jackson found in the oak chest stolen by Hiram Grady was the likely murder weapon.) In Cato's narrative, he supplied

a map identifying the location of the grave. (This was the exact location where Sam Culver's men unearthed the bones a few years ago.)

Well, Cato had an insurance policy in the event that Griggs and The Family turned on him. The attorney who delivered the letter said that there were five duplicates of the same, including one for "The Office of the Phillips County Prosecutor" and another addressed to the editor of the *Messenger*. The letter bore the date October 5, 1909. Herbert W. Smallwood was a young state senator at the time. George Smallwood, John Culver, and Calvin Houghton were deceased; and by 1913, the only remaining living person named was Joe Griggs. He died in May. Did Cato forget about the pitfall he dug? The only loose end was whether Lavinia was aware of the plot. To a degree, she had an alibi: ruffians from the docks beat her unconscious during a robbery attempt and the doctor sent her to County Hospital for treatment. Captain Hall organized his revenge the next morning. Regardless, the county prosecutor didn't think it was worth pursuing. Mrs. Hall is elderly, ailing, and taking care of her "incapacitated" daughter-in-law. Besides that, Cato reported that Captain Hall told the lynching party that Pete beat her mercilessly after she defended herself against his unwanted advances. (The notes from Nester Horne's suppressed investigation of the assault of Lavinia when he was a reporter for the *Messenger* expose this as a lie.) "Times were different. The county was in his pocket, so her family had to set this right." Hmm… I think we need a new county prosecutor. Mrs. Hall decided to "set things right." She provided Sheriff Smallwood, her younger brother, with a written statement detailing the brutality she endured at the hands of Captain Hall, and it was he who beat her unconscious in the backyard. Her husband's son Clyde took her to the hospital and told the doctor that ruffians were responsible. She did not regain consciousness for several days. When aware, the *Messenger* had already printed the lie. Lavinia wouldn't dream of disgracing her husband, stepson, and The Family by revealing the truth. Though Lavinia hoped the long circulating rumors that Pete skipped town were true, she suspected he was dead. Even then, the thought that her husband and relatives planned and participated in his murder never crossed her mind. On the other hand, Joe Griggs seemed the most plausible Brutus. Lavinia and Pete had a friendship before her arranged marriage to the older Captain Hall, and they continued to exchange letters, but they were not lovers.

Coroner Cordell was satisfied to release the remains in storage for burial now that they have been identified. Beyond Cato's posthumous account, the bones are old, they belong to a man, and there is the ball that passed through the skull that supports his conclusion. Good enough. They solved the mystery! Indeed, the pieces fell in place by chance: Agnes Tedder (Ashcraft) found the forgotten Murray burying ground, Sam Culver received praise for having the remains of a founding family removed to County Cemeteries, while repeating his success with another founding family (the Haynes of the Northeast River), he uncovered bones of a murdered man, and Cato's fatal injury resulted in revealing all we thought lost to history. In a gesture of good will, Sam Culver offered to pay for the funeral expenses and tombstone. The grave will be located next to the recently reinterred Haynes family. Hopefully, our coroner will unite the other Haynes relatives buried in Lavinia's backyard with their tombstones. So, is this fate? Ella thinks not. The intersection of so many different paths doesn't lead to solving the mystery. Cato pinned the answers to his legacy.

Liz and Florence are kidnapped

Don't worry, Ladies. They escaped! This is how it happened. That rascal Norton Highsmith caught sight of Homer, Liz, and Florence at the "social." A few days later, the "special constables" snatched them at Haynes Town. Here is Liz's statement.

Florence and I arrived at Haynes Town dressed in our commonplace mail order attire ready to while away the afternoon chatting with the locals and perhaps do some shopping. In the event of trouble, we had pistols in our bags. At this point, I was not carrying my credentials or anything else to identify me as a railroad detective. We assumed Homer was nearby at the station. It offers an expansive view of the commercial section of this minuscule town, and the section house where he worked had a similar view. Little did we know he was tied up inside a boxcar. While strolling on the sidewalk, Norton Highsmith stepped out from the entrance to the drug store and tipped his hat. We smiled. At the same moment, I felt the barrel of a gun press into my back. In a whisper, the man behind me said, "Don't budge an inch and keep quiet. We're here to arrest you. Just do as you are told, and nobody is getting hurt. See that lady across the street watching. If you make a scene, she'll receive a bullet along with you two." The Hudson pulled up beside us, and a man holding a revolver stepped out, showed his badge, and his partner took our bags. "Would you ladies please place your hands behind your back. Yes, like that." After we were handcuffed, his associates nonchalantly placed us in the back seat of the Hudson, seated between two, and the others took their seats in the front. Proceeding on County Highway heading northeast toward the county line, the man beside the driver turned around. "Hello, Miss Phelps. A pleasure to see you again." Florence frowned. "And this must be Sheriff Smallwood's lady detective Myrna Levesque. A pleasure to meet you." I nodded nervously. "As you can see, I replaced some of my colleagues after our former boss Mr. Wentworth decided we had outlived our usefulness." I spoke up. "Did you kill those men you took from the railroad district?" He chuckled. "We don't kill, simply deliver. Our clients select the location where he wants us to leave their merchandise, and let them deal with the ransom, or other course of action we choose not to think about. It's less risky to leave the acquisition of the desired commodity to professionals." While I had a chance, I asked another question. "Did you take Clyde Parnell, Hiram Grady, and Authur Mallet?" He thought for a moment. "I'm sorry, ma'am. I'm not familiar with some of those names, but Mr. Parnell was one of our clients. I'll never forget him. I lost three of my best men and another two hired on last minute because we expected trouble. Some gunman named Wilkes was guarding our merchandise. He had already killed an amateur who tried to do the job." The driver turned onto the path leading to the boatyard. Florence spoke up. "You're not locking us up in that dark tunnel again?" He dangled a key. "The client said put them in the workshop. Miss Levesque is worth a big ransom. Her daddy is the boss of bosses around here and in places beyond. I was told Miss Phelps here needs a change of venue. In other words, another country, or maybe an island. Alright, ladies, here we are."

Despite her promises, Jane did little to secure the boatyard. She had the main gate mended and didn't provide a lock for it. The wharf was gone, but without a fence anybody with a small boat could access the property. It appears the only motive she had for doing anything at all was salvaging the *Mackerel*. Just to let you know, Granddaddy James and Mr. Buchanan would pay any ransom to get Liz back.

The workshop had a large ironclad double door with pull rings secured by a padlock in front and all the other doors and windows were bricked in. After we entered, the leader pointed out a bucket of water we could drink from and said the client would come to take us elsewhere after he settled up. With that, the men left and locked the door. Florence whispered, "Didn't

you say something about getting out of handcuffs without using a key, or is that wishful thinking?" I do things, not wishfully think about doing them. "Yes! Myrna is teaching me. I have a leather packet of picks inside my boot." I went down on my knees, unlaced my boot, and removed the packet from the pocket stitched inside the rear. Being familiar with the make of handcuffs (definitely not the best), it only took a few minutes to loosen one and slip out my hand. I then picked one open partway on Florence's pair so she could free herself likewise. "If we hear them opening the door, slip your hand back in. They'll never notice it's loose." After returning my picks to the boot and lacing it up, we pondered how we could escape. The building has a lantern roof with massive timber trusses supporting it. A long, sturdy workbench is set in the center of the room. It has many drawers. Outside of a bin filled with wood scraps, there is nothing in the way of fixtures and accoutrements except for a stool.

Most of the drawers are empty, but some had several things which could be useful. Of these, a blade for a small plane, and about a dozen nails of assorted sizes. Searching the wooden bin proved fruitless. Florence found several pieces of rope scattered about, none more than four feet in length. She tied them together. After taking off her jacket, she wiped the perspiration from her face with it and then tossed it on the workbench. "Think I can get up there to the windows? It looks to be at least sixteen feet." Why not? She lifted herself onto the workbench, which was about four feet tall. Upon positioning the rope over the beam above and grasping both ends, she lifted her entire weight with her arms, swung up, wrapped her legs around the beam, and then righted herself. "Take off your jacket, twist it up, do the same with mine, and knot them together." Once done, I handed them up to her. Bestriding the beam, she reached down and retrieved the jackets. Twisting them further, and then in the fashion of a linesman, she knotted them around the web beam of the truss, straddled it, and pulled herself up its incline by moving the loop around the timber upward. Her legs gripped the beam like a vise. Before reaching the rafters, a horizontal beam intersects the web beam. It supports a catwalk that leads to a small platform containing the gearbox for opening the windows of the lantern roof. Beside it, paralleling the rod ascending from the gearbox, there is a wrought iron ladder leading to a ledge running the length of the windows. The same is true with the windows on the opposite side, at least eight feet away. Florence discovered by turning the rod with her hands, an array of small gearboxes and rods opened the windows outward, one after another, from one side to the end. The windows on the other side operate by a separate mechanism. From her perch on the ledge, more than twenty feet above the floor, she surveyed the environs. "I see the river. A small building with a shed roof is attach to this one. There is a large yard extending to the water, other brick buildings not as big as this one, wood piles, several unfinish big boats, little boats turned upside down on the ground, piles of metal, stacks of lumber, and coils of rope. Except for the river, it looks like this place is fenced in. On the other side, trees; and downriver, the railroad bridge." I asked whether she saw anybody. She didn't, and no automobiles. "We need a longer rope to get off the roof. Let's rip up our jackets and add in pieces of rope." She quickly made her way to the floor with ease. Using the plane blade to start the rips, in short order, we knotted and braided a makeshift cable from our jackets and the rope about ten feet in length, and then discussed our plan of escape. Florence suggested that we follow the paths through the woods to the bridge. She knew all of them. "I think we should go now. It certainly not going to take them long to get paid." At that moment, I had an idea. No longer needing our cuffs to pull off a deception, I removed my picks, unlocked them, and then used both pairs to secure the pull rings on the door. "That ought to buy us some time." Having the makeshift rope in hand, Florence repeated her ascent to the lower beam.

Once there she dropped one end of it and helped me up. Amazed, I asked, “What made you think of all this?” She replied, “I’m a country girl. We climb trees, jump streams, and know how to fight. Have you ever punched out a boy?” Of course, and I fought Florence, too. Carefully, we made our way to the catwalk, and then up the ladder. Once on the tin roof, I surveyed the environs under an open sky, not a soul in sight. Where were they? The searing metal surface prompted Florence to cringe in pain when her back and rear touched it. She took hold of our cable, turned on her back, and used the flat of her shoes to walk down feet first to the lower roof of the engine house attached to the workshop. I attempted to replicate Florence’s gymnastics but ended up sliding freely off the workshop onto the lower roof. From there, we jumped the remaining distance to the ground, about seven feet.

Fueled by pure animal instincts, never before had my mind raced so quickly. “Let’s move into the trees and make our way down to the water. Want to swim across?” Yes! We waded neck deep in the chilly water around the boatyard docks. Our plan changed quickly. The numerous old rowboats stacked on shore upside-down offered an alternative. We found a sturdy Jon boat overturned between some trees near the water. Quickly, we righted it and casted off. The swift current carried us down river away from the boatyard. By my estimate, between the time we were locked inside the workshop and making it into the river was approximately an hour. It looked like we made a clean escape. That, as things turned out to be, was entirely illusory. “Liz, we don’t have something to steer this boat!” The current was drawing us ever faster to a stretch the locals call the narrows. Nearly everybody who falls in drowns. The only way to pass under the bridge in a small boat safely is if it is powered by a gasoline motor. Even then, it is difficult to avoid the eddies around the stone bridge piers. Florence gave a slight laugh, then said, “Let’s get out of these skirts, climb out, hold on to the sides, and swim to shore before the current pulls us in.” That worked until our boat became no longer steerable. About forty feet from the water's edge, we had to let go. Florence swam to land while I was being pull towards the deeper water. Unable to get back, I swam with the current. At the bridge, I went under the water and then through the gap between the piers. Upon returning to the surface, I heard Florence calling to me from a distance, but I couldn’t swim to the shore until the towering bluffs of the narrows were behind me. By that time, the current had taken me about a mile downriver. After crawling up on dry land, my next hurtle was struggling through the scrub eastward to the railroad tracks.

Florence’s statement continues. After struggling to climb atop the bluff, she saw Liz emerge beyond the bridge and continue swimming downriver with the current. Florence decided to dash to Northeast Depot to get help. At the semaphore a mile and a quarter away from the bridge, she found trouble.

My anxious thoughts turn to terror! “You damn Houdini; stop where you are!” Two men converged on me from the shadows cast by the trees. On hearing the cocking of a revolver, I froze. Norton Highsmith grinned. “We know you would be heading this way. What took you so long? Where’s your friend?” It took all my strength to answer. “She didn’t make it. The current took her under. Are you going to shoot me?” Lester Whitaker growled, “That all depends.” He grabbed both my arms from behind while Highsmith placed his hand around my throat. “Too bad we lost the other one; at least, we have Miss Florence. Her life might be worth something, say, in a big city cathouse. We’re going back and visit a while before taking a ride at dark. You’re going to behave yourself; otherwise, I hope you are as good at

underwater escapes as walking through walls." He released my throat, and then laughed. "You can't imagine how much trouble it took to break down those doors! Mighty good thinking, girl! Move! Into the trees!" Lester pushed me forward. No sooner had he spoken did a cobble the size of a baseball bounce off his head! The cocked revolver he was holding at his side discharged before his limb body toppled over. I rolled to the ground to the side of Highsmith, picked up the fallen man's revolver, and shot Whitaker in the left shoulder joint as he was taking aim at Liz with his rifle. He swung around and fell backwards. Liz snatched up the rifle. I stood up, and then stared at the writhing man as he shrieked in pain. "Shut up, Lester! That's nothing. I doubt whether you'll use that arm again, but you'll live. Did you have those polite special constables kidnap me the first time, too?" He nodded. "Thought so. That's my friend Liz Buchanan, not Myrna Levesque. Your hired help took the wrong lady. Lucky for you! Liz, how's Highsmith doing?" She weakly muttered, "He's breathing. The railroad men are coming! Step away from these men, drop your firearm, and raise your hands. We do not want to be shot by a station police officer."

****

Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Hennessy, and Major Durant rushed to Northeast Depot on the first outbound train after the stationmaster at the depot and Sheriff Jackson telephoned them. Deputy Phales and I arrived first by automobile. At that moment, our station doctor was removing the bullet from Mr. Whitaker's arm in the infirmary. Used to treating sprains, broken bones, burns, and gashes, this was the first time he performed this type of operation. Whitaker was thoroughly sedated. Nevertheless, the station police posted a watchman in the infirmary in case of trouble. The town doctor was treating Mr. Highsmith. He deemed it appropriate to have an ambulance take him to the hospital at Spring Garden. They had an X-ray machine, but it was the doctor's opinion that the force of the blow wasn't sufficient to fracture his skull. However, he was concerned about bleeding on the brain. Liz and Florence were being detained in a storage room at the rear of the freight office. The town constable and the station officer, unable to confirm their identity or understand what had happened, took them into custody. When Sheriff Jackson arrived, he must decide whether to hold them in jail or release them to us. Seeing Liz in her undergarments did not surprise me but finding her soaked in smelly river water and caked with mud was shocking. Her beautiful hair was a wild mess. Florence was not much better. At least, they were given blankets from the infirmary. Both needed a hot bath and a fresh changing of clothing. I was stunned to see those two struggling to speak. Florence didn't try. She mumbled responses to our questions while gazing at the floor. When Sheriff Jackson and his deputies arrived, it was getting dark. Liz suggested that we continue the proceedings at the Laine County jail. She wanted to clean up, put on dry clothes, have a meal, and take a nap before giving her statement. Florence was so sore that she could hardly move. Mr. Hennessy suggested that the sheriff have his deputies take the ladies before the newspaper men arrive. In the meanwhile, it would be prudent to prepare something for the press. Hopefully, Sheriff Smallwood might joint us.

From the moment we learned that Liz and Florence escaped from the abandoned boatyard, Sheriff Smallwood sent Chester and some deputies there to investigate. He found the ironclad door forced open apparently by an automobile, the interior pull ring of one door was broken off and dangling from two pairs of handcuffs. The ladies' bags were left outside, each containing their firearms. Cornelius went up to look for the Hudson; but after a thorough search of the roads in that section, he found nothing. Sunset forced him to return to the field.

Upon returning to Port Unity, my task was retrieving the necessary items of clothing and those for beautification from Liz's wardrobe. To make thing simple, I selected her stylish charcoal suit

with matching coat, hat, and shoes. The next morning, my task was finding appropriate apparel for Florence. She's taller than me and anatomy textbook proportioned, so I had the matron take her measurements. This was a job for Bland's Dress Shop. They were happy to put together suit similar that of Liz for twice the cost. It was ready by the afternoon. I purchased her hat and shoes at Gilford's, and then Deputy Phales drove me to the courthouse at Spring Garden. They were looking quite polished for meeting with the county prosecutor at four o'clock. Sheriff Smallwood presented his findings from the search of the boatyard, including their bags. Homer Utley, rescued from the boxcar at Wayne City Yard, described how he was clubbed by Norton Highsmith and imprisoned for a northbound ride on a freight train. Sheriff Smallwood produced the packet of lockpicks from Liz's boot. She demonstrated how to open one of her cuffs, and then repeated the task with her hands secured behind her back. Once done, she placed the picks on the table, closed the open cuff around her free wrist, and returned to her chair. Chester presented the makeshift rope he retrieved from the roof of the engine house at the boatyard, noting one end was tied off inside the lantern roof of the workshop. Finally, Mr. Hennessy described the joint agreement, and Deputy Phales presented the paperwork pertaining to their assignment. The prosecutor immediately declared he would not be pursuing any charges against Liz and Florence. Since Whitaker and Highsmith committed crimes in Laine County on railroad property, Mr. Buchanan must submit the charges. He did! Sheriff Smallwood will continue his investigation and discuss charges with our county prosecutor. With the situation clarified, our friends were released. What followed was a rush of newspapermen. Back home, Liz assumed her shield of perfection. I find it ironic that she was the first to benefit from all the training Ella and I received in thwarting kidnappers.

****

While initially overwhelmed by trepidation during her abduction, Liz quickly regained her presence of mind. On being shut inside the workshop, escaping the cuffs was almost reflexive. (We practiced picking all the most common pairs repeatedly to improve our speed.) Thereafter, her resourcefulness combined with Florence's resolve allowed them to escape from the workshop ahead of the arrival of Whitaker and Highsmith. The hardest challenge she faced aside from pitching the stone that downed the latter was resisting the current drawing her through the narrows. Nobody has ever been able to swim across at that place; and those who fall in, drown fighting the current. One achievement resulting from this harrowing experience was Liz utilize her wiles to charm the leader of the "special constables" into revealing who planted explosives in the tug. Not Whitaker, not Boss Griggs, not Cowan; it was Wentworth! Who was he? Mr. Hennessy pass this revelation on to Charles Creswell. Our county prosecutor Mr. Kerns obtained an arrest warrant for the man.

The disappointing result of Liz proving herself in this clandestine assignment is that Mr. Hennessy dropped her from future work of this sort for the time being. News of the escape of the fearless ladies was taken up by the big city newspapers. After that, she was too recognizable. Mr. Hennessy called her the third Levesque sister. Ella found it ironic that "Lady Elizabeth" did not delight in the attention. I laughed. The public has a veracious appetite for adventure stories that must be continuously fed. We are not in the business of providing meals for a bottomless pit.

Epilogue

Chester won the election – hurrah! He will become our new sheriff a few months from now. Liz and I look forward to working with him. You might be wondering what we've been doing over the last several months. I'm taking engineering courses at the university and doing drafting for Mr. Skinner. Ella is happy supervising her women station officers. Liz is unavailable until the

conclusion of the Lester Whitaker trial. No, ladies, Sheriff Smallwood didn't make her vanish like Emma. She and her daddy are temporarily occupying the penthouse atop the Eighth Floor of Unity Station Office Building. Major Durant is supervising the security detail guarding them around the clock. Likely, Lester is in greater danger since he must be brought from the Laine County Jail where he is serving a sentence for aggravated assault and trespassing on railroad property. His attorney persuaded the Laine County prosecutor to reduce the charges against him in exchange for exposing the new hierarchy of moonshine trade in that county. He now has a multitude of enemies. His Northeast River Navigation Company is now defunct. The flow of liquor slowed to a trickle, then rebounded. Norton Highsmith recovered from his blow to the head, but the court deemed him unfit to stand trial. He is now at the state hospital. To a degree, he is better off there than in prison. During the interim after our ladies' kidnapping, Florence benefited from her notoriety. Stories of her previous travails and the marvelous escape appeared in magazines. Recognizing her exceptional beauty, advertisers offered her a contract to model dress suits for ladies' magazines. Liz wants none of that. Improving her investigative skills is all she is concerned with these days. After this trial, she will spend the spring working with Creswell & Associates.

There has been no progress in the Arthur Mallet case. Hiram Grady is still a wanted man, and the "special constables" remain at large. The only encouraging unrelated tidbit I have to report at the moment is the missing remains of Joseph Haynes and his family were recovered from Lavinia's backyard. Coroner Cordell and historian Delmer Willis discovered a diagram of the grave plots of the former Episcopal Church burial ground in the records of County Cemeteries. Now, that mystery is solved. They were interred alongside their kinfolk the Haynes of the Northeast River. That's it for now. Expect a new installment of our adventures and antics when there is something worth writing about.

END

6:02:48